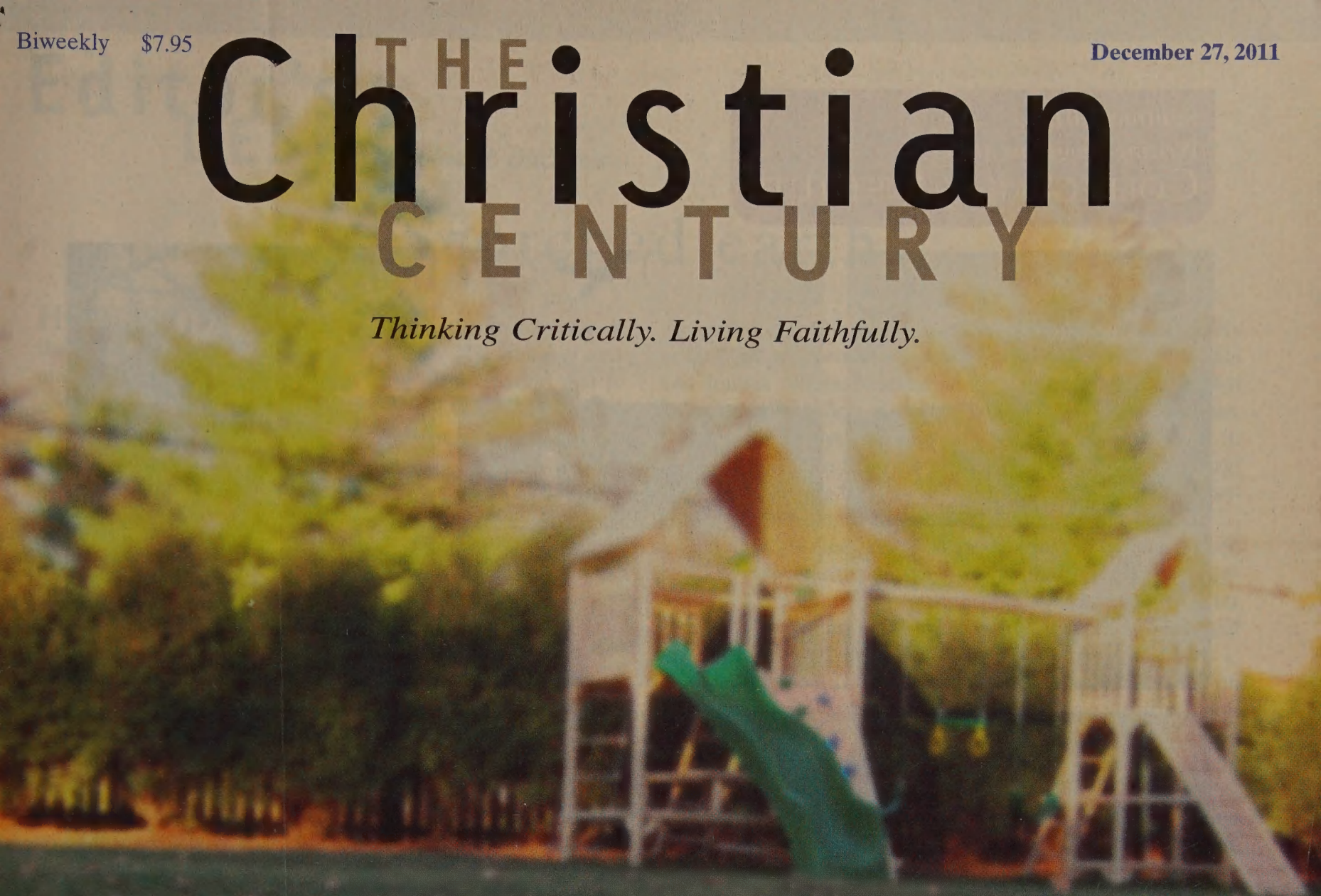
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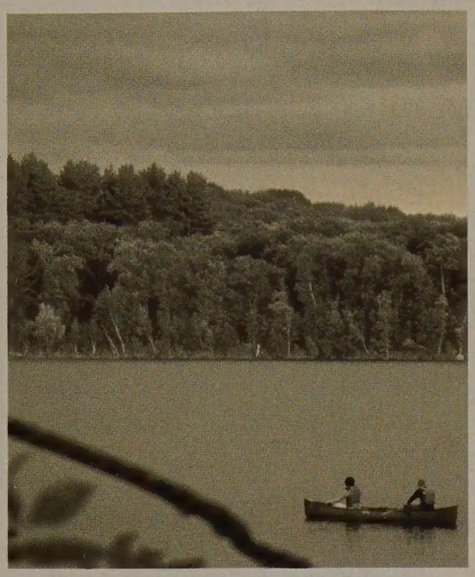
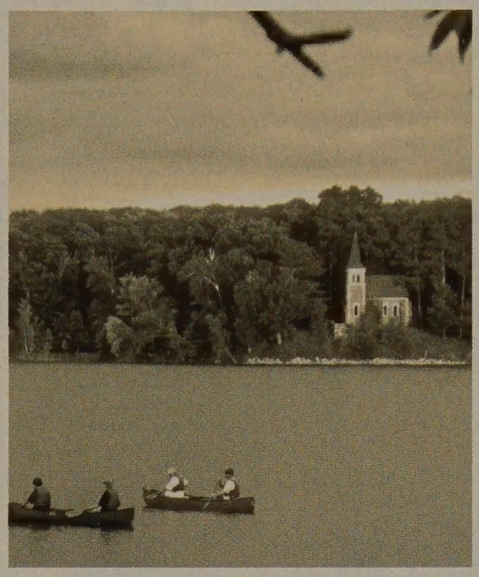
Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.



Sandra Steingraber on how we're poisoning our kids

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Editor's DESK

by John M. Buchanan

Scorched earth

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE to read the first chapter of the Bible and not be an environmentalist? The stunning and unique affirmations of Genesis 1 point to a creation that is good, one that reflects the being and will of God. The first and primary human moral obligation is to take care of the place. How can people who believe that the Bible is or contains the word of God ignore this directive?

In the U.S., it is a particularly dicey time for those concerned about the environment given the fractured political atmosphere and the absence of rational discourse in the primary election campaign. Sandra Steingraber presses to revive the conversation. In an interview (p. 22), she discusses the environmental crisis we are in and puts it in ethical context. She invokes one of my personal heroes, Presbyterian minister and newspaper publisher Elijah Lovejoy, who opposed slavery and was killed in a proslavery riot in the 1830s.

Steingraber calls President Obama's recent override of EPA protections against smog pollution the worst decision the administration has made. Smog leads to ozone, she reminds us, and "ozone kills people—elders and infants disproportionately." The dilemma is that our economy has become dependent on ruinously destructive practices. Steingraber calls our dependency on fossil fuels a "homicidal abomination."

So why aren't we talking about this? Why have global warming and environmental concerns disappeared from the political agendas of both parties? In the October 16 *New York Times*, reporter Elisabeth Rosenthal observed that as recently as the 2008 presidential election, both candidates John McCain and Barack Obama warned about human-influenced global warming and publicly supported legislation to curb emissions. Only the U.S., says Rosenthal, has stopped talking about it. Europe has always been ahead of us on this issue, and emerging economies like those of India, China and Brazil are pursuing "aggressive climate politics."

But in the United States, says Rosenthal, the issue has been hijacked by powerful right-wing leaders who have made "skepticism about man-made global warming into a requirement for electability, forming an unlikely triad with antiabortion and gun-rights beliefs."

I am disappointed that the president overrode the EPA on emissions. I am also disappointed that ideologically driven politicians have transformed an issue that has everything to do with our future into a political litmus test, so that no one in either party can risk talking about it.

We could let the discouraging reality of the environmental crisis lead us to despair. But Steingraber calls this despair the "biggest obstacle to social and environmental justice."

Instead, in such a time as this, we need more activists like Steingraber, those who firmly refuse to lose hope and who believe that people of good will and reasonable intelligence can act to pull us out of this crisis and ensure a viable future for our grandchildren.

Alan Geyer
(1931–2011)

We mourn the death of Alan Geyer, ethicist, ecumenist and editor of the CHRISTIAN CENTURY *(1968 to 1972).*

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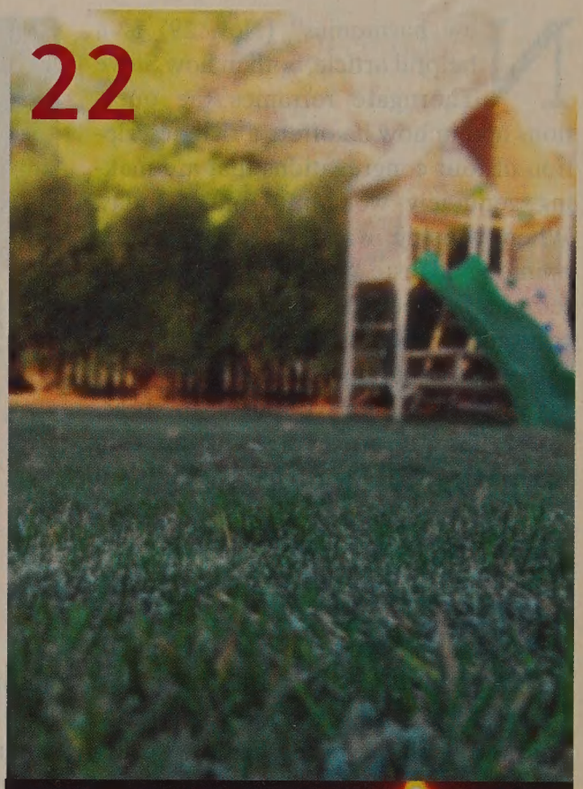
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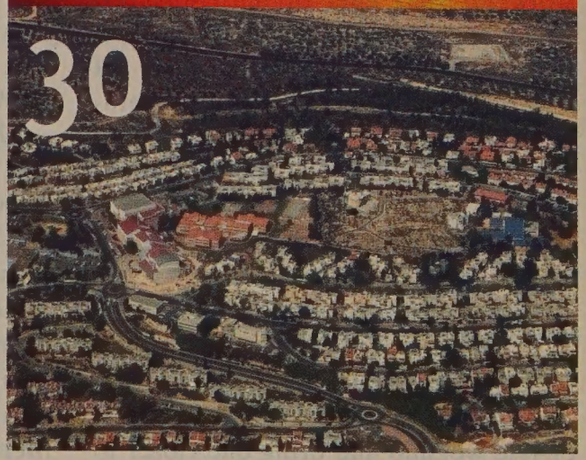
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New harmonies

New harmonies" (Nov. 29) is a helpful article, both in how Steve Thorngate reframes the questions and in how he offers a rich description of four congregations that are making genuinely worshipful music today. When worship wars are about genre, opinion and taste, "traditional" and "contemporary" become brand names for consumer products—and so no longer about the experience of prayer in making music together. All four of the practice settings the article describes are contemporary and traditional in different ways.

After 30 years of encouraging unaccompanied congregational singing, first in a college chaplaincy at Yale and then as a founding rector at St. Gregory of Nyssa Church in San Francisco, I know well that Russian chant, Renaissance hymnody, shape-note hymns, South African freedom songs, plainsong and newly composed music can make a coherent whole.

Mark Bowman's work at United Church of Rogers Park sounds closely related to what we have been doing over the past ten years in renewing preliterate traditions of leading music by example through the use of call and echo, call and response, etc. We've commissioned new composers to write new music in their own styles, rhythms and preferred modes, but in forms that work for that kind of music-making, because it is that kind of music that takes people to an experience of singing a new song to the Lord together, and it makes learning, discovery and fresh creativity part of the mix as we sing our prayer.

Donald Schell
President, All Saints Company
christiancentury.org comment

The core question about worship music, I believe, is: Does the music enable worship and bring one closer to God? I have found worship-enhancing



music in everything from a simple guitar-led song to a choral work at Westminster Abbey. Whatever the musical style, it matters greatly that the attitude is reverent, focused on God and backed up by prayer

My reaction to worship at House of Mercy in St. Paul on my only visit was very different from Steve Thorngate's. The music was old-style country, with a cloying, 19th-century sentimentality that was profoundly jarring in a church that is supposedly contemporary and emergent in style. You can describe the music as quirky; I would say it reinforced a style and substance that struck me as elitist in the worst sort of way. Good worship truly knows no categories. Neither does bad.

Paul Martin
christiancentury.org comment

Steve Thorngate responds:

I appreciate Donald Schell's comments, particularly on the point that "traditional" and "contemporary" have been reduced largely to brand names. While all churches have both traditional and contemporary elements in the literal sense, the brands have so thoroughly colonized these terms that, practically speaking, we're better off leaving them behind (at least in a church-music context).

Paul Martin clearly did not enjoy the worship at House of Mercy, and I won't try to talk him out of that reaction. I do wonder, however, what he means by the phrase "supposedly contemporary and emergent in style" and why he applies it to this congregation. Does House of Mercy make any fundamental claims about its identity that are somehow contradicted by its use of old gospel hymns? I'm not aware that it does.

Funeral practices . . .

Lucy Bregman's account of the "evolution of funeral sermons" ("Speaking to mourners," Nov. 1) points out some of the hazards that ministers have faced in conducting funerals at different cultural moments. And the hazards are many. Funerals can be staged as therapeutic expressions of grief, with no proclamation of the resurrection; they can be theologically correct proclamations that never engage the mourners who are present; they can be so intent on "celebrating" a life that they become like a jovial retirement party at which friends and family focus on the deceased's loyalty to the White Sox and love of fishing.

Each approach has an element of truth, but each by itself is inadequate. The best pastors are able to weave the various purposes of a funeral together without losing track of the essential elements, which are—as Tom Long spells out his book on funerals, *Accompany Them with Singing*—the person who has died, the realities of the life that was led, the particular people who are gathered to mourn, and the message of Jesus' victory over death.

D. J. Tertius
Chicago

THE Christian CENTURY

December 27, 2011

Out of Afghanistan

By the end of 2011, almost all U.S. troops will have left Iraq, bound for home or for other American bases around the world. The military evacuation of Iraq constitutes a logistical feat. At the peak of the war 170,000 troops were in Iraq, operating out of 500 military bases, some the size of small cities. One Pentagon official said that future soldiers will use Iraq as a case study in the massive transfer of personnel and material.

The Iraq war ends without a peace treaty or victory march. This misadventure has cost over $800 billion so far and taken the lives of more than 4,000 American soldiers and as many as 600,000 Iraqis. It represents a defeat for the neoconservative dream of bringing liberty and American dominance to the Middle East by a military invasion. Ironically, the war decreased American influence in the region and put Iran in a stronger position relative to its neighbors. Al-Qaeda is alive and well in Iraq, where it continues to be a menace, attacking and killing civilians, police officers and soldiers.

When running for office in 2008, President Obama accused his predecessor of taking his eye off the ball—the fight against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan—by focusing on regime change in Iraq. He argued that Iraq was a war of choice, Afghanistan a war of necessity.

But the case for a military presence in Afghanistan was already waning. The primary objective in Afghanistan—the dismantling of al-Qaeda networks there—has been largely accomplished.

It's time to declare that U.S. objectives have been accomplished in Afghanistan.

What remains is a tribal conflict which, as Jonathan Steele points out in his book *Ghosts of Afghanistan*, preceded even the Soviet Union's occupation of the country in the 1980s. The Soviets and now the U.S. have tried to defuse tribal rivalries but have only perpetuated and reconfigured an ongoing civil war.

The American military's costly, decadelong presence in Afghanistan hasn't resolved the underlying problems. It ranks 135 out of 135 countries on the United Nations Human Poverty index, and in 2010 Transparency International declared it the third most corrupt state in the world. Indeed, the U.S. presence has only made matters worse. It's time to declare that U.S. military objectives have been accomplished in Afghanistan and bring home those troops too.

VOICES of 2011

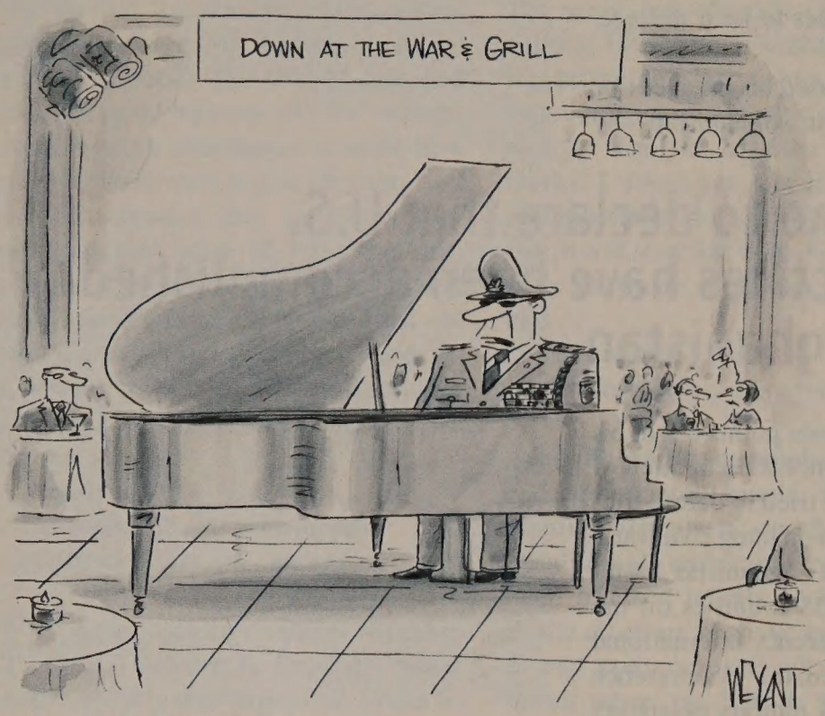
Sources: *Boston Globe*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times*, RNS, *Time*

"I Used to Be Afraid . . . I Became an Egyptian."
—sign (in Arabic) seen in Tahrir Square in Cairo during protests that led to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's regime

"I hope from the bottom of my heart
that the people will, hand in hand,
treat each other with compassion
and overcome these difficult times."
—Japanese Emperor **Akihito** after the March earthquake, tsunami and subsequent nuclear crisis embroiled his country

"Greece is bust, essentially."
—London economist **Gabriel Stein** on the likelihood that Greece would default on its sovereign debt

"While [Muammar] Qaddafi is a bad guy,
being a bad guy with a long history of brutality
and terrorism is not a moral justification
for the United States to go to war."
—**Robert Parham**, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, arguing that the situation in Libya did not meet just war criteria for U.S. intervention



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"This next song goes out to anyone who's ever been in love with the idea of invading Iran."

"However emotionally satisfying to Americans,
Osama bin Laden's departure from the scene
is unlikely to produce definitive results.
It does not mark a turning point in history."
—Boston University professor **Andrew J. Bacevich**, arguing that the U.S. is engaged not in a war on terror but in a struggle to control the Middle East, particularly the oil-rich Persian Gulf

"It has been a really tough weekend."
—**Harold Camping** after the Rapture that he had predicted would happen on Saturday, May 21, failed to occur

"Now we know the reality of so many others in the world where violence pierces the lives of the innocent."
—**Olav Fykse Tveit**, general secretary of the World Council of Churches and a Norwegian, following the shootings in and around Oslo that left at least 76 people dead

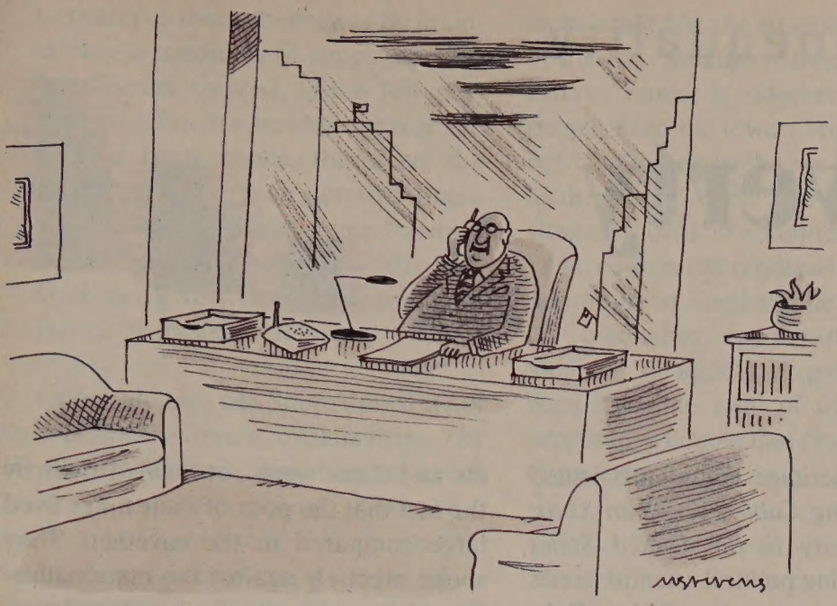
"This Shari'a law business is crap. It's just crazy.
And I'm tired of dealing with the crazies. It's
just unnecessary to be accusing this guy of
things just because of his religious background."
—New Jersey Republican Governor **Chris Christie**, defending his nomination of Sohail Mohammed, a Muslim-American, to be a judge on the state Superior Court

"This deal is a sugar-coated Satan sandwich. If you lift the bun, you will not like what you see."
—Representative **Emanuel Cleaver** (D., Mo.), a United Methodist minister, tweeting about a congressional deal that raised the debt ceiling

"My friends and I have been coddled long
enough by a billionaire-friendly Congress."
—**Warren Buffet**, the world's third most wealthy person, supporting a higher tax rate for the super-rich

"There is nobody in this country
who got rich on his own."
—**Elizabeth Warren**, candidate in Massachusetts for the Senate, challenging the idea that seeking higher taxes for the wealthy is class warfare

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"Oh, just the usual here, occupying Wall Street."

"It's a shame that there's an economic state that we feel like we have no recourse in our government, that we feel like we have to go out and protest in the streets."
—**Erin Cadet**, an Occupy Wall Street participant, grad student and actress

"I'm wondering when that day will come where they will be asked to wear the yellow star."
—**Mary Bauer**, legal director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, about migrant families living under Alabama's tough new immigration law

"I want you to know I am a Christian, I'm a Methodist, and I voted for this law. This legislation was written by Christians."
—Alabama state senator **Bill Holtzclaw**, a Republican, responding to critics of the state's immigration law, which one Methodist bishop described as the nation's "meanest"

"I'm not a spokesman for my church, and one thing I'm not going to do in running for president is become a spokesman for my church or apply a religious test that is simply forbidden by the Constitution. I'm not going there."
—Republican presidential candidate **Mitt Romney** speaking about his Mormon faith

"Under normal circumstances, [Newt] Gingrich would have some real problems with the social-conservative community. But these aren't normal circumstances."
—**Tony Perkins**, head of the Family Research Council, on the bid by the thrice-married Gingrich to be the Republican nominee for president

"They are reading it like a sacred text. . . . You are not supposed to worship your constitution. You are supposed to govern your government by it."
—**Jerrold Nadler** (D., N.Y.), talking about how Tea Party members view the Constitution

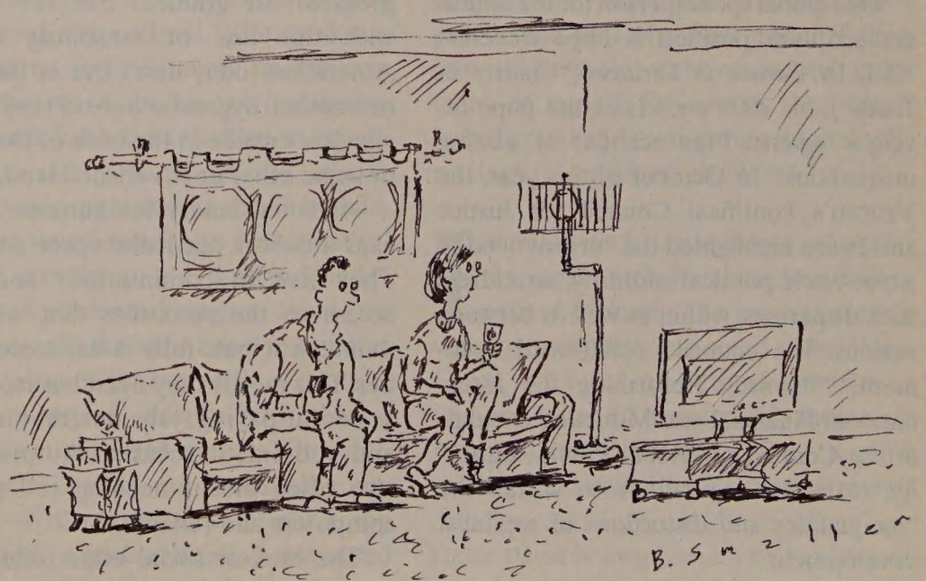
"In the ashes and the aftermaths, we knew that we had lost Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, men, women, young, old. And a decade later, that unity that we felt must continue to inspire and guide us."
—Secretary of State **Hillary Rodham Clinton**, speaking about the 9/11 anniversary at a September 7 reception marking Eid al-Fitr, the holiday that concludes the month of Ramadan

"This is a tragedy, one of the great sorrows of my life. With more benefit of hindsight, I wish I had done more."
—**Joe Paterno**, Penn State football coach, in response to allegations that his former assistant Jerry Sandusky had sexually molested minors

"Too many universities are sports factories posing as academic institutions. The overemphasis on sports is a leading cause of America losing its competitive edge."
—Sports columnist **Buzz Bissinger**, commenting on scandals that rocked universities like Ohio State, Penn State and the University of Southern California

"Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow."
—Apple CEO **Steve Jobs**'s last words, according to a eulogy by his sister Mona Simpson, after his death in October from pancreatic cancer. She said Jobs's words expressed his sense of wonderment

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"He could be psychotic or he could be appealing to his base."

Relative poverty



© ZAGORSKID

by William Bole

WHICH VIEW of economic inequality has greater merit? The one espoused by Adam Smith, the father figure of capitalism? Or the teaching that unfolds from the Bible's pleadings for justice and righteousness?

It's a trick question. In fact, these two perspectives are broadly the same. Smith, like the biblical writers, was opposed to gross income inequality. They agree that the issue of how people are faring relative to others in society is not simply a question of envy. It's a matter of human dignity and social well-being.

There's another outlook on inequality that has many adherents. Let's call it the We Got Stuff school of thought. It points out, correctly, that almost everyone in the U.S. has things not even the rich had at one time—like microwaves and color televisions. And even the down-and-out have a standard of living that eludes most people in destitute nations. That's what matters, according to this way of thinking. Widening gaps between rich and poor are beside the point.

One global spokesperson for the Smith-and-scripture position is Pope Benedict XVI. In *Caritas in Veritate* ("Charity in Truth"), his 2009 encyclical, the pope inveighs against "the scandal of glaring inequalities." In October of this year, the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace highlighted the "urgent need of a true world political authority" to address such disparities, within as well as between nations. The council's 6,500-word document, "Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority," calls for regulations to curtail the "inequalities and distortions of capitalist development."

As for the We Got Stuff school, this summer the Heritage Foundation issued *Air Conditioning, Cable TV, and an Xbox: What Is Poverty in the United States Today?* Following political scientist James Q. Wilson, Heritage senior scholars Robert Rector and Rachel Sheffield declared that the poor today live better than the rich did a century ago and enjoy conveniences that the middle class couldn't afford in the recent past.

Using Census Bureau data from 2005, Rector and Sheffield examined the home of the average family living below the federal poverty line. They found that, for example, "in the kitchen, the household had a refrigerator, an oven and stove, and a microwave." Also spotted were washing machines, ceiling fans, cordless phones and coffeemakers. "Poor families certainly struggle to make ends meet," the authors allowed, "but in most cases, they are struggling to pay for air conditioning and the cable TV bill as well as to put food on the table."

Rector and Sheffield are right that we shouldn't take our society's material progress for granted. But the trouble with this line of reasoning is that Americans today don't live in the 1890s or another bygone era. And they generally don't reside in the bush of Botswana or some other impoverished land, either.

As is customary for humans, Americans inhabit a particular space and time. They live in communities and need access to the resources that will help them participate fully in those communities. This means they need basics, such as a decent-paying job, health insurance and retirement security. At present it also often means needing cell phones, computers and reliable cars.

The biblical social ethic reflects this sense of particularity. The Jewish prophets and Jesus were not bowled over by the fact that the poor of their times lived large compared to the cavemen. They spoke precisely against the marginalization of economically disadvantaged people *within their social contexts*.

Ronald J. Sider offers a compelling analysis of this biblical tradition in *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*. For example, in the Hebrew scriptures the poor are seen as being on the verge of "falling out of the community," as Sider puts it. He quotes Leviticus 25:35–36: "If members of your community become poor in that their power slips with you, you shall make them strong . . . that they may live with you." That's Sider's emphasis on "with you," which underscores the inescapably relative quality of economic wellness.

Behind this ethos is a levelheaded account of human nature. "Precisely because of what scripture tells us about sin and power, biblical people must always oppose great extremes of power," Sider writes. "In a fallen world, powerful people will almost always take advantage of weak neighbors. And money, especially in a market economy, is power. Therefore, great extremes of poverty and wealth threaten justice and democracy."

In this connection Sider invokes John Calvin, who, in commenting on the biblical call for debt forgiveness every seven years (during the "sabbatical year"), wrote this:

> In as much as God had given them the use of the franchise, the best way

William Bole's writing has appeared in the Washington Post, New York Times *and* Los Angeles Times. *He blogs at TheoPol.com.*

to preserve their liberty was by maintaining a condition of rough equality [*mediocrem statum*], lest a few persons of immense wealth oppress the general body. Since, therefore, the rich if they had been permitted constantly to increase their wealth, would have tyrannized over the rest, God put a restraint on immoderate power by means of this law.

One could also cite Smith's doctrine of "necessaries." Smith explains in *The Wealth of Nations*, that human needs include not just the rudimentary supports of life but "whatever the customs of the country render it indecent for creditable people, even the lowest order, to be without." Smith's examples are linen shirts and leather shoes. While ancient Greeks and Romans could live comfortably without them, custom has rendered each "a necessary of life in England," he wrote in 1776. "A creditable day-laborer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty."

Notice that neither Smith nor the Bible argues against the existence of *any* economic inequality. Material inequality is part of life, this side of eternity. What they warn against are gaping divides in which people grapple to keep from "falling out of community."

Millions of Americans—the unemployed, the working poor, the uninsured and many others—have been falling for quite some time. That some of them may be doing so with cordless phones in their hands is not much consolation.

The cat that walked by faith

Little Boots

by Lillian Daniel



© PEETER VIISIMAA

WHEN WE SAW a container of Kentucky Fried Chicken dancing in the middle of the street, my husband and I stopped to investigate. Out of the box crawled a terribly skinny kitten with long black fur and bright white paws. She had been making the box dance as she tried to lick out the last crumb. She purred as she leaned into me with her whole body. We named her Little Boots.

Little Boots thrived on cat food, a trip to the vet and lots of love. But she remained very small—and displayed some odd behavior. She would act as if she were sneaking up on our other cats to attack them, but she was in plain sight, right in front of them. By the time she pounced, the cats had moved away. She couldn't figure out how they knew she was coming.

It was only when we found her walking on a second-story porch rail, precariously sticking her paw out into the air as she felt for her next step, that we realized the obvious. Little Boots was blind.

From then on, that cat became my hero. Nothing stopped her. When she ran into a wall, she would turn back and run the other way. When she walked into a piece of furniture, she remembered where it was the next time. She didn't sit still. Her little white paws were always out in the air in front of her, testing, searching for her next foothold.

Little Boots seemed to walk by faith instead of sight—the perfect companion to take to divinity school. We moved that little cat to four different apartments, and each time she had to relearn the lay of the land. Each time she had to adjust.

In my last year of divinity school, when I was pregnant with my first child, I learned that Little Boots had a critical medical condition. My husband and I were grad students living on loans; we had no money for expensive treatments that might or might not work.

I became so despondent that I couldn't eat. At eight months pregnant, I stopped bathing and changing my clothes. With hormones swirling my moods like a bad cocktail, I examined my rotten life and asked the hard questions. How would I take care of a baby when I couldn't even provide for my cat? How could I choose between savings and helping a little blind creature? Where was God? In the end all the questions had the same answer: I was in no position to bring a new life into the world.

Yes, I had faced greater tragedies in life than the loss of a cat. So there was a part of me that observed myself falling into melancholy with enormous judgment of myself. Of course, that didn't help. I could add "self-indulgent and self-pitying" to my list of problems.

I would watch Little Boots asleep on my pregnant belly, rising and falling with my breath. The cat was clearly slipping away into more and more sleep. Given that I was not fit to be a pet owner and was going to be a terrible mother, it became clear to me that I'd be a terrible minister as well. But I dragged myself

Lillian Daniel is senior minister of First Congregational Church (UCC) in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

out of the house to school, where I was pretty sure nobody would want to sit next to me since I didn't want to sit next to myself.

"We've taken up a collection," Maureen said one day as she pushed a thick envelope of money into my hand after chapel services and gave a stern look at my dirty clothes. It was like the envelope that drug dealers slip furtively to each other in television crime dramas. When I opened it, I saw hundreds of dollars. "It's for Little Boots," she whispered. "Now you can take her to the vet."

I did not know Maureen very well. She was a middle-aged biologist who wore small wire-rimmed glasses and sensible sweaters. She taught at Yale Medical School but for some reason had decided to study divinity. She had always struck me as logical, scientific, intelligent and not particularly emotional. Yet she had taken up the collection. Was she just a passionate animal lover? Or a passionate people lover? I never got to ask her. I rushed back to give my husband the news that Little Boots had been rescued. We went to the vet with the envelope full of anonymous donations.

It turned out that the treatments did not work. Little Boots slipped serenely away to her next destination as she lay in my husband's arms. But as sad as we were, we were left serene as well. We were not haunted by the thought that we could have done more. We had done what we could, not because of our own power but because of a community that decided to pitch in—and the Holy Spirit that runs through it. I had wondered where God was, and God had shown up.

I was able to turn my attention back to preparing for motherhood. I regained my appetite and—fortunately for my husband—my desire to bathe. While what lay ahead of me still seemed impossible, I knew I wouldn't have to do it all myself. I was not alone in this big adventure.

I thought often of Little Boots, my role model for the easygoing traveler. She was always ready to adjust to her surroundings. She traveled light and was open to anything. Her long cat stretches were nothing compared to her inner flexibility.

And of course she did not overexamine her life. She had the benefit of being a cat. But she also seemed to be a particular kind of cat, one that expected the world to be a loving and delightful place. Unable to see the pitfalls ahead, she stuck out her paw to feel her way. While she couldn't see what was ahead, she seemed to trust that she was surrounded by love. And of course she was.

When I think of all the creatures I have loved and lost, I realize that although I thought I was taking care of them, they were taking care of me. I think this is what God had in mind. We're here to look out for one another.

Eighteen years later, the baby I was carrying is heading off to college. In some ways I feel as helpless to protect him as I did back then. But I know now that his welfare was never up to me alone. There has always been a cloud of witnesses, a community to step in and make this hostile and lonely world a loving place worth exploring. As my son prepares to go out into the world, I think of Little Boots, who walked by faith and not by sight.

Solitary confinement

Put away

by Joyce Moore Gouwens



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PRISONERS AT California's Pelican Bay State Prison caught the nation's attention in July with their three-week hunger strike. Their protest originated in the half of the prison that's called the Security Housing Unit, where some 6,600 inmates spend 23 out of 24 hours a day for years on end in small, windowless cells. In its editorial "Cruel Isolation" (August 2), the *New York Times* spoke out against Pelican Bay and the excessive use of solitary confinement in U.S. state and federal prisons.

While the U.S. persists in using confinement as punishment, the Geneva Convention forbids excessive use of the practice. Even at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, where acts of sexual humiliation and physical abuse were officially approved, a decision to keep a prisoner in isolation for over 30 days required special permission from the commanding general. This is because, as University of California psychologist Craig Haney observed, many prisoners in solitary confinement "begin to lose the ability to initiate behavior of any kind, sinking into chronic apathy, lethargy, depression and despair . . . sometimes even to the point of becoming catatonic."

In the *New Yorker* article "Hellhole" (March 30, 2009), Atul Gawande reported on a study of 150 naval aviators who had been imprisoned in Vietnam. The men told of having found "social isolation to be as torturous and agonizing as any physical abuse they suffered." Senator John McCain has concurred. "It's an awful thing, solitary! It crushes your spirit."

In *Den of Lions*, Terry Anderson describes the effects of prolonged isolation endured during seven years as a hostage in Lebanon. "The mind is a blank. Jesus, I always thought I was smart. Where are all the things I learned, the books I read, the poems I memorized? There's nothing there, just a formless, gray-black misery. My mind's gone dead. God, help me." Anderson finally snapped, and before guards could restrain him, he had beaten his head against a wall until it was smashed and bloody.

Despite growing recognition that long-term solitary confinement actually causes mental illness—and makes prisoners lifetime wards of the state—the U.S. continues to build more prisons that focus on solitary confinement. Says Laura Sullivan for NPR, "These places have many names—supermax, intensive-management units, secure housing—but the meaning is the same [for the prisoner]: years alone, out of the public view and away from public oversight."

These supermax prisons house an estimated 25,000 long-term prisoners at two to three times the cost of "general population" imprisonment. For the large numbers of mentally ill inmates who've been incarcerated because of the lack of secure mental hospitals in the U.S., the isolation that's often used to punish their outbursts is especially devastating.

There are some signs of improvement. Several states are changing the way prisoners are treated, often against strong opposition. They have discovered that by providing humane treatment in regular prison cells, with social interaction and productive activities, they can save dollars as well as lives. Giving prisoners the skills and counseling they need to succeed outside of prison gives them hope, reduces prison violence and lowers the number of attempts at self-mutilation and suicide. There is also evidence that more humane treatment reduces recidivism and the need for more prisons.

New Mexico's legislature plans to establish a committee to study the impact of solitary confinement on prison inmates, its effectiveness in reducing problems within the prison, and its cost. Committee members will include corrections officers, psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as representatives of the ACLU and religious groups.

Anti–solitary confinement movements are also gaining strength in Pennsylvania, Oregon and Virginia—inspired by the outrageous cost of our prisons. According to the Pew Center on the States (2008), a nonprofit think tank that has funded research for prison reform programs in Arkansas, South Carolina and Texas, one out of every 100 adults in the U.S. is in prison or jail. Some states are spending close to $50,000 a year per inmate.

These states are also no doubt inspired by the turnaround in Maine. Grassroots pressure in Maine led Governor Paul LePage to appoint Joseph Ponte as corrections commissioner. His plan is to reduce the use of solitary confinement and to end inhumane disciplinary practices.

Ponte had already straightened out some of America's most violent prisons before coming to Maine. He's been given the needed support to throw out staff who resist change, and he aims to retrain guards, insisting that they use more constructive ways to maintain control. This is in a system that had been putting prisoners into isolation for getting a tattoo or hoarding food in a cell. The extreme disciplinary actions had created a vicious cycle of rage and mental problems.

Louisiana was once infamous for Angola Prison, known as the Alcatraz of the South. In 2007, the state began a partnership with the Pew Center. By 2009, Louisiana had decreased recidivism by 33 percent—the first time in decades that the state had experienced any reduction at all. Its investment in residential treatment and alternative sentencing, along with improved parole supervision, has paid off handsomely. Louisiana has been able to cancel prison building projects because inmates are prepared ahead of time to reenter society and are helped to integrate into society when they go home.

In 2007, Texas projected a shortfall of up to 17,000 prison beds over the next five years. New prisons would cost an estimated $900 million. Stunned by the cost, the legislature requested assistance from the Pew Center to oversee a reinvestment program for the following five years. They then voted to invest $241 million in developing preventive programs in local communities and programs within the prisons to improve social interaction and productive activity and to reduce strict confinement in isolation. Now it looks as if there may be no need for all those extra beds.

As a prisoner advocate, I often receive mail from the relatives of inmates. One mother wrote about her 19-year-old boy, who sometimes reacts to confinement in a maximum-security prison with occasional head pounding, much as Terry Anderson did. She writes, "[My son] was restrained because he was banging his head on the wall, so they restrained him in these hard restraints for four hours as he lay on a thin pad on a concrete slab with wrists and ankles shackled to metal rings, with a heavy chain across his torso. [She included a picture of her son in restraints.] Soft restraints are to be used if it is mental health–related, but the officers claimed he was doing this to make a mess, as he got blood everywhere. He was offered no medication to help calm him down, nor any psychiatric care. This is criminal treatment!" At times he has had all his possessions taken away, including his Bible and bedding, and he has been left hog-tied for hours.

Ultimately we are all responsible for this sort of abuse—and we should heed the warning of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons: "What happens inside jails and prisons does not stay inside jails and prisons. It comes home with prisoners after they have been released, and with corrections officers at the end of each day's shift. . . . We must create safe and productive conditions of confinement not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it influences the safety, health and prosperity of us all." CC

Joyce Moore Gouwens is a restorative justice volunteer and prisoner advocate.

Sources include:
Religion News Service (RNS)
Ecumenical News International (ENInews)
Associated Baptist Press (ABP)
denominational news services

A surge in faith-based lobbying

The number of religious advocacy groups in the nation's capital has more than tripled since the 1970s, with conservative groups experiencing the biggest growth, according to a new report.

Together, faith-based lobbying and advocacy groups spend $390 million a year in Washington to influence lawmakers, mobilize supporters and shape public opinion, according to the nonpartisan Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The study reflects shifting fortunes in religion and politics: the rise of the religious right 35 years ago, the decline of mainline Protestant churches and the outsized presence of the Roman Catholic Church.

The largest category of advocacy comprises the 54 groups that either represent multiple faiths or advocate for religious and moral causes without representing a specific religion.

Conservative groups have seen some of the largest budget increases. The National Organization for Marriage, for example, which has racked up victories in its fight against gay marriage, saw its budget grow from $3.2 million to $8.5 million between 2008 and 2009.

There are now as many Muslim advocacy groups (17) as mainline Protestant groups (16), and evangelicals and Roman Catholics constitute 40 percent of religious lobbyists in and around Washington.

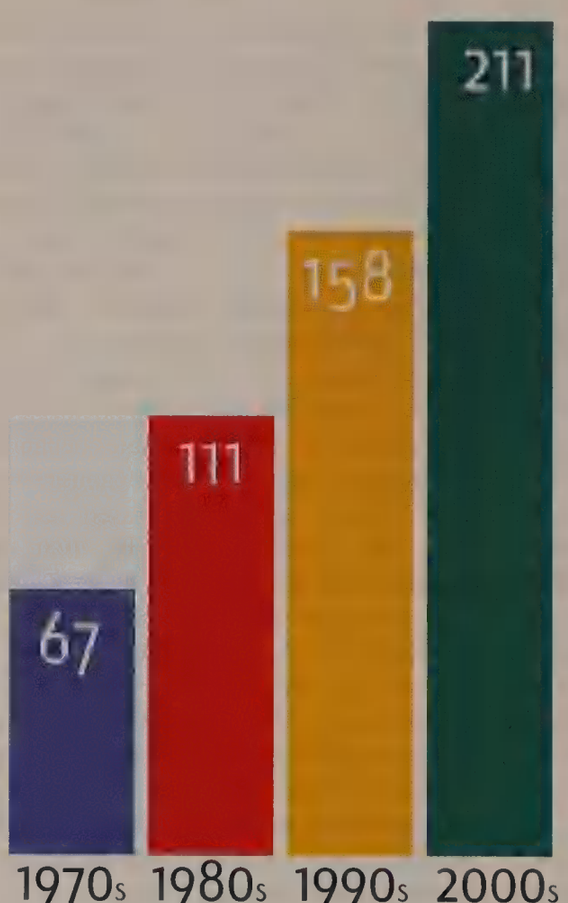
"Religious advocacy is now a permanent and sizable feature of the Washington scene," said Allen Hertzke, a political scientist at the University of Oklahoma and the primary author of the analysis released November 21.

Hertzke's report surveyed 212 religious advocacy groups, ranging from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to the American Jewish Committee to the American Friends Service Committee (Quaker). The number of groups surveyed by Pew has grown from 67 in the 1970s to 212, and Hertzke conceded that figure is probably an undercount. "We don't claim to have gotten all of them," he said.

Using financial reports from public tax forms, Hertzke said the biggest spender is the pro-Israel American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which spent $87 million on advocacy in 2008. U.S. Catholic bishops were second, with $26.6 million spent in 2009, followed by the Family Research Council, with $14 million in 2008.

The biggest winners and losers—at least as judged by their budgets—reflect the turbulent politics of the last few years:

- As the Obama administration took office and the recession worsened, the progressive PICO National Network boosted its budget by about $100,000 to advocate for the poor, health-care reform and other social justice causes.
- The nation's Catholic bishops boosted their advocacy budget by $1.4 million as fights heated up against Obama's health-care overhaul and same-sex marriage.
- The Muslim American Society boosted its budget by 29 percent, and



GROWTH OF D.C.-BASED RELIGIOUS ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

*Number of organizations in each decade**

*The year of D.C. arrival is unknown for one of the 212 groups in the study

SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE, *LOBBYING FOR THE FAITHFUL*, NOVEMBER 2011

the American Islamic Congress by 41 percent, between 2008 and 2009 as Islamophobia intensified in the form of opposition to mosque building and the so-called Ground Zero mosque.

Many religious advocacy groups are relatively modest operations; the median annual budget was about $1 million for the 131 groups whose financial data were available.

Most groups split their portfolios between domestic and international issues, with a plurality (42 percent) representing individual voters or constituents. Just 15 percent represent religious bodies such as denominations.

Despite their presence in the nation's political capital, only a small sliver of groups—7 percent—have formed political structures that are able to advocate for or against particular candidates. The vast majority of groups are tax-exempt and prohibited from partisan politics.

That surprised Maggie Gallagher, cofounder of the National Organization for Marriage, who traced the rise in religious advocacy to the political ascent of conservative Christians in the late 1970s and 1980s.

"Not everyone has to be involved in politics, but if you are going to claim to want to be involved in politics, you need to build institutions to accomplish your political goals," said Gallagher, who has been targeting candidates who support same-sex marriage. **–Kevin Eckstrom, RNS**

Mormon PR blunts Jews' unease with Romney

Two groups that opposed former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney's 2008 presidential run were evangelical Protestants and Jews. Many of the former believe that Mormons constitute a cult; the latter have long been offended by the Mormon practice of providing proxy baptisms for Jews who died during the Holocaust. Then there was Romney's 2008 campaign kickoff at Detroit's Henry Ford Museum.

"Why would an American presidential candidate choose to announce his candidacy at a museum dedicated to the memory of America's most notorious and influential anti-Semite?" Jewish lawyer and author Alan Dershowitz wrote in February 2007 in the *Huffington Post*. "I believe Mitt Romney owes the Jewish community, indeed all Americans who hate the sort of bigotry represented by Henry Ford, an explanation and an apology."



Mitt Romney

RNS / MICHAEL S. GORDON / *THE REPUBLICAN* OF SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

Fast-forward four years and it's clear that Jewish opposition to Romney has been neutralized, thanks in part to some skilled diplomacy on the part of leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The LDS Church in 2009 quietly flew in Jewish leaders for all-expenses-paid tours of Mormon temples, the Brigham Young University campus, Temple Square and Welfare Square, the latter an impressive facility showing the church's worldwide charity work. Mormons emphasized the commonalities between one of the world's oldest religions and one of its youngest, plus showing that it shares biblical concerns about the poor.

"All us rabbis were totally blown away," said Rabbi John Crites-Borak of Amud ha-Shachar/First Light in Los Angeles. "We talk a good game about social justice work. It's a fervent idea in Judaism—but Mormons do it like nobody's business."

Participants reported intense theological discussions, on topics ranging from Israelite temple worship during King David's reign 3,000 years ago to how Jews survived as a faith community over the millennia. The notoriously publicity-conscious LDS Church knows its image needs a major brush up—and what better group to ask for advice than the Jews, America's most-loved religious group? (The "most-loved" statistic comes from the 2010 book *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, which as it happens was co-written by a Jew, Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam, and a Mormon, David E. Campbell.)

Romney's faith could be a problem in GOP primary

IF REPUBLICAN presidential candidate Mitt Romney can secure the nomination, his Mormon faith shouldn't be an obstacle for voters in the general election, according to a recently released survey.

That nomination may be a big "if." The survey from the Pew Research Center shows that white evangelical Protestants—the heart of the GOP primary electorate—are most likely to know that Romney is a Mormon and least likely to support him.

That news came as polls showed Newt Gingrich emerging as Romney's chief rival for the nomination, and as the focus turned to the Iowa caucuses in early January. The Hawkeye state's Republican Party is dominated by the kind of conservative Christians who view Romney's Mormonism with suspicion.

The Pew survey of 1,576 registered voters, conducted November 9–14, shows that while 54 percent of Republicans and those who lean Republican believe that Mormons are Christian, just 35 percent of white evangelicals agree with that statement. Some 53 percent of white evangelicals say Mormonism is not Christian. Just 17 percent of them say they will back Romney in the primaries, as opposed to 23 percent of all GOP voters.

On the other hand, the poll also shows that evangelical opposition to President Obama is strong. Nearly nine in ten of those who say Mormons are not Christians would back Romney over Obama. Romney's "religion has implications for his nomination run but not for the general election, should he be nominated as his party's standard-bearer," the Pew report says. **–RNS**

"They want to be recognized as a valid faith tradition instead of a cult and be integrated into American society like the Jews," says Rabbi Niles Goldstein, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Interreligious Diplomacy, who was on the guest list. "They want to be more accepted and integrated. Because Jews have this long history of being blamed for everything from capitalism and communism to the death of Jesus, it makes sense they would want to talk to us."

Mormons consider the Jews as their spiritual ancestors, and the LDS presents itself as a restored Israel with its own temple, prophet and priesthood. The parallels with ancient Israel are deliberate; there's even a Jordan River coursing through north-central Utah, and the Great Salt Lake just to the west of Salt Lake City has been likened to the Dead Sea.

"They humbly said in no way they wanted to compare themselves to Jewish suffering over the ages," Goldstein says, "but in North America, they have a long history of persecution by the federal government."

The Mormons took Jewish leaders through a temple, comparing it to Israel's ancient edifices.

"We [rabbis] looked at one another as we saw the conscious efforts of the Mormons to build something close to what the original temples contained," Goldstein adds. "While they view their religion as an expression of a restored priesthood, we feel the rabbinate has supplanted the priesthood. For some, this was disturbing; for others, like myself, I found it very interesting."

The trips were the brainchild of Erik Ludwig, the former executive director of the United Jewish Federation of Utah, and Mark Tuttle, the interfaith director for the LDS Church. Top Mormon officials—including some of the church's 12 ruling "apostles"—made themselves available for discussions and kosher meals.

"There was this incredible level of hospitality," says Rabbi Brad Hirschfield, president of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership. "At a lunch, not only was the food I ate kosher but the whole event was kosher-catered. I asked why and they said, 'You can't feel like you're at home if you're eating something different from us.'"

Rabbis use phrases like "holy envy" and "new openness" to describe LDS largesse.

"A generation ago," says Goldstein, "the idea of the Mormon church flying two or three dozen Jewish leaders to Salt Lake City, putting them up in a hotel and a Mormon elder taking them around" would not have emerged.

Relations improved after the two sides inked an agreement on proxy baptisms in September 2010. And the Mormons' charm offensive brought results. No Jewish leaders are complaining about Mormons these days.

President Obama won 78 percent of the Jewish vote in 2008, according to the National Jewish Democratic Council. Since then, his stock has fallen among some Jews because of a perception that he is sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Romney seems to be doing well among Jewish voters this time around.

"Romney's Jewish supporters say what's most inspiring about the Republican presidential candidate is that he actually does rather than just talk," opined the Jewish *Daily Forward* in July. The magazine added that Romney and a Jewish backer had just completed a fund-raising trip to Florida that netted the campaign $1.8 million. **–Julia Duin**

Backers say Baylor prof faces firing for his views

A BAYLOR University professor is fighting dismissal charges that supporters say are aimed at silencing a dissident voice in America's Jewish community.

According to published reports, Marc Ellis, university professor of Jewish studies and director of Baylor's Center for Jewish Studies, said during a November 21 speech to the American Academy of Religion that he has become a victim of "selectively enforced" policies regarding practices that are routinely overlooked.

Ellis, an expert in Holocaust studies and liberation theology, said former Baylor presidents defended his outspoken opposition to U.S. and Israeli policy toward Palestinians. He claimed that current Baylor president and former Bill Clinton prosecutor Kenneth Starr was personally involved in efforts to fire him, a charge denied by Baylor spokeswoman Lori Fogleman.

Neither side is discussing details of the charges. Ellis has hired a lawyer to fight his dismissal on the basis that he is a tenured professor. Several high-profile individuals have come to his aid. Princeton scholar Cornel West, feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether and Archbishop Desmond Tutu cosponsored an online petition on his behalf to "stop persecution" of a dissident voice.

Fogleman told the *Waco Tribune-Herald* that the charges against Ellis have nothing to do with his exercise of academic freedom, but due to privacy rules she could not go into the details without the professor's permission.

Ellis's attorney, Roger Sanders, questioned whether timing of formal charges filed November 18, just three days before Ellis was to be honored by the 10,000-member American Academy of Religion at its San Francisco annual meeting, was intended to embarrass the professor. Fogleman said the dates were coincidental and that the charges came after a period of due process.

Ellis told the academy that his duties were curtailed after the investigation began. He said all of his classes for the fall semester were canceled unilaterally, and he was stymied in efforts to bring West, an acknowledged scholar and frequent commentator on political talk shows, to the campus in Waco, Texas.

Ruether, visiting professor at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University, told the Waco newspaper that Baylor wants to get rid of Ellis because it considers his views on Israel too controversial. She said she believes that Ellis is willing to accept severance, because the Baylor environment is unfriendly and he is near retirement age. She wondered why the university didn't negotiate with Ellis instead of risking notoriety by firing him. **–Bob Allen, ABP**

Faith groups aided Occupy as winter, police moved in



RNS / LAUREN POND

***RELIGIOUS SUPPORT:** Volunteer Matthew Streib, 29, part of Occupy Church DC, serves food at the group's Thanksgiving meal, held at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. In a number of cities, churches have assisted the Occupy movement.*

As Occupy camps nationwide dealt with police crackdowns and the inevitable onset of winter temperatures, religious communities of all stripes stepped in with offers of shelter and solidarity.

Soon after police forcibly evicted the original Occupy Wall Street camp in New York's Zuccotti Park on November 15, many of the protesters began sleeping and gathering in church buildings, including Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village.

"The eviction . . . really shifts what happens here, and it really boomed the movement, because immediately there was this network in place that we'd developed of communities throughout New York that were willing to open up their doors and house the movement," said Michael Ellick, a pastor at Judson Memorial.

Ellick and his colleagues got involved early on, marching to Zuccotti Park with a golden calf fashioned to look like the iconic Wall Street bull statue. After that, phones were "ringing off the hook" with churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and monasteries wanting to get involved in some way, he said.

Various religious groups have held services at Zuccotti Park, which in turn have "reradicalized" their congregations, Ellick said. "Initially it was just sort of a few churches who work a lot together on these issues," he said. "Now it's actually a pretty hefty power base in New York City."

A recent poll by the Public Religion Research Institute and Religion News Service found that fewer than a third of Americans say the Occupy movement represents their concern over the widening disparity between rich and poor, but the police evictions seem to have boosted religious support for the movement.

According to Ellick, more than 1,400 faith leaders from around the country signed a pledge of solidarity with Occupy protesters, many of them jumping in only after police cleared Zuccotti Park.

In the nation's capital, about a dozen Christian activists started an ecumenical Occupy Church at Washington's Occupy K Street encampment. The Occupy Church held a prayer service every Saturday at noon and tried to establish a full-time, rotating chaplaincy for the protesters. An interfaith coalition calling itself "Occupy Faith DC" hosted a free Thanksgiving meal at a historic Washington church for about 300 of the protesters.

On the West Coast, a network of religious communities sprang up in Portland, Oregon, to support Occupy Portland after police cleared the camp on November 13. Since the eviction, the city's First Congregational Church and First Unitarian Church have hosted meetings of the movement. While many of the campers search for places to stay, First Unitarian has been housing their gear and the media tent, making the church Occupy Portland's unofficial hub.

About 25 clergy and religious leaders spent the night before the eviction at the camp, praying and providing nonviolence counseling. They included Chuck Currie, a United Church of Christ minister, who said a number of young people thanked or prayed with the religious emissaries. That was "astounding," especially because only one in four Oregonians identify with a faith tradition, Currie said. "A number of people expressed surprise that we were there. They did not realize that the church had an interest in these issues."

In the somewhat milder clime of Los Angeles, a shifting number of protesters had camped out on the downtown Civic Center lawns since October 1. City council leaders had welcomed the protesters, though health and safety concerns led to a previously announced police sweep to disperse the area in the early hours of November 30.

A protest was registered by members of the Occupy L.A. Interfaith Leaders Support Network, which said that there had been "an unacceptable level of violence" as police arrested 292 protesters. Clergy leaders, including two Episcopal priests, objected to rough treatment after two months of peaceful occupation.

Legal observers and clergy were invited by the police to witness the sweep and to help defuse tensions. Rabbi Jonathan Klein, who was involved in Occupy L.A. from its start, cheered fellow protesters who cooperated with the police.

After a meeting November 29 of Interfaith Leaders Support Network with Police Chief Charlie Beck and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a statement issued by the group reflected on common goals of faith leaders, protesters and civic officials. Villaraigosa, the current president of the National Conference of Mayors, expressed his appreciation for the protesters and "echoed clergy leaders in highlighting the power of nonviolent civil disobedience for the sake of righteous causes."

A *New York Times* article noting the closing of major Occupy gatherings quoted David S. Meyer, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, on what might be the movement's legacy: "Occupy takes its name from the occupation. If Occupy continues without occupations, what provides continuity with those people in Zuccotti Park? The slogan 'We are the 99 percent.'" **–RNS, other sources**

In Tunisia, popular Ennahda party tests 'moderate' Islam

NEARLY A YEAR after Tunisia set off the Arab Spring of popular revolt, the face of political Islam in this fledgling Muslim democracy is a 47-year-old pharmaceutical executive who favors tailored suits and stiletto heels.

Souad Abderrahim's main political experience was as a student union leader more than two decades ago, but the political neophyte is now cheered at rallies and trailed by the media as a leader of Ennahda, the Islamist party that has become the main political force in this North African country.

Abderrahim holds a seat in the country's new Constituent Assembly, charged with creating a democratic political structure following the downfall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who ruled Tunisia for nearly a quarter century.

The mother of two said she felt compelled to emerge as a spokeswoman to curtail fears that Ennahda would curb women's rights or mix conservative religion and politics. "When I saw the phobia on the streets about Ennahda as a hard, backwards party, I felt it was important to be with them and shed light on this false image," she said.

The Tunisian uprising triggered the Arab Spring protests that upended politics from Libya to Yemen, and Tunisia's subsequent steps toward democracy are being closely watched as a model for other countries.

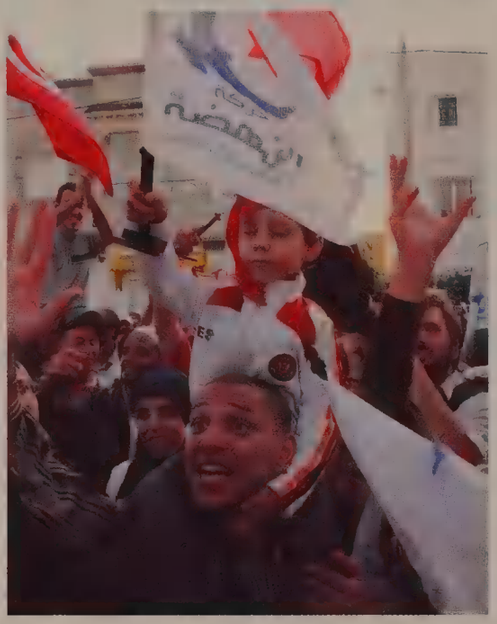
"Tunisia today is the major test of the Arab Spring," says Mansouria Mokhefi, head of Middle East and North Africa programs at the French Institute of International Affairs. "The direction it goes depends on the success or failure of Tunisia."

That's why the spotlight is on Ennahda, which styles itself after Turkey's ruling center-right Justice and Development Party. Its inclusive message and corruption-free image have attracted a wide following across all levels of society.

Will it make good on its promises to uphold Tunisia's pro-Western, secular foundations and women's considerable rights? Or, as some critics maintain, is Ennahda hiding a more radical agenda? The answer, analysts say, may shape the future of political Islam that is gaining ground in countries such as Egypt, Morocco and Libya.

"Whether it will be moderate Islam as appears the case in Tunisia and Turkey or another form is unclear," Mokhefi said. "But it's an inevitable, unstoppable march by Muslims, young and old, toward what they feel is a reappropriation of their identity."

Abderrahim is not a typical face of political Islam, or even Islam itself.



RNS / ELIZABETH BRYANT

TUNISIA AS MODEL: Supporters of the Islamist Ennahda party rally in Tunisia as the North African country tentatively makes its way toward democracy. Its uprising was the first in the Arab Spring movement.

Declining to wear a headscarf, she has emerged as a passionate and articulate defender of women's rights. Driving in from her upscale villa in the Tunis suburb of Manouba, Abderrahim expertly juggles cell phones and the steering wheel in her commute to Ennahda's headquarters downtown. She keeps in touch with supporters through Facebook.

"Women can have every degree of liberty, while respecting our religion and traditions," she said. "Equality at work, equality in all the Tunisian projects." That inclusive message is echoed by other Ennahda officials who have forged a governing coalition with two secular, leftist parties.

"We take inspiration from the ethical values of Islam which we believe are universal values—freedom, dignity, equality," said Yousra Ghannouchi, the London-raised daughter of Ennahda's founder Rachid Ghannouchi. "Religion is not something we believe the state will interfere in or impose. It's a matter of personal choice."

Others are not so sure. Women's rights activists demonstrated in front of the assembly building as the new government began work on November 22.

"The big question is are we going to deal with women's rights through positive laws and codes—which Ennahda vows not to touch—or are we going to return to the Shari'a [Islamic law], even if it's a soft interpretation?" asks prominent rights campaigner Khadija Cherif.

Opposition parties in the new government sound similar warnings. "There are lots of things in Ennahda's program that represent a danger, notably the relationship between politics and religion," said Samir Tayeb of the small, staunchly secular Democratic Modernist Pole coalition.

Probed about her beliefs, Abderrahim appears to stray off Ennahda's tolerant message. She disapproves of homosexuality, children born outside of wedlock, and marriages between Tunisian women and non-Muslim foreigners. "Tunisia is a Muslim country, and we have our own customs, traditions and Islamic requirements," she said. "So we can't have these kinds of freedoms that other parties want."

Western governments have signaled their readiness to work with Ennahda. But Tunisia observer Steven Ekovich at the American University of Paris is not surprised at the lingering wariness. "There probably should be some worry about what Ennahda may try to do," he said. "But on the other hand, Tunisians are going to be very vigilant. They're not going to let Ennahda go too far in the direction of an Islamic fundamentalism that doesn't suit the Tunisian temperament—or Tunisian history, for that matter." –Elizabeth Bryant, RNS

People

■ Activist-author **Cornel West** will return to New York City's Union Theological Seminary in the summer as a professor of philosophy and Christian practices. West, who was an assistant professor at Union in 1977, has also taught at Yale and Harvard, leaving the latter university in 2002 after disagreements with Harvard's president. West, author of 19 books, including *Race Matters*, has been teaching at Princeton, where he will keep connections as an emeritus professor. Union president Serene Jones, who once studied under West, told the *New York Times* that the seminary is a good place for West to exercise "his scholarly commitments and his activism."

■ **Barbara D. Savage**, a professor of history and American social thought at the University of Pennsylvania, has won the 2012 Grawemeyer Award in Religion for her 2008 book *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion*. Award director Susan R. Garrett, dean-elect at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, said Savage's book explains why it is misleading to speak of "the black church," given the enormous diversity among African-American congregations and a lack of political activism in the early 20th century. "The crucial role of black churches in the civil rights movement was not inevitable but something of a miracle," said Garrett, reflecting on Savage's insights. The $100,000 prize money is presented by the seminary and the University of Louisville.

■ Nine years after the clerical sexual abuse scandal forced his resignation as archbishop of Boston, Cardinal **Bernard F. Law**, 80, has stepped down from his controversial post as head of a prominent basilica in Rome. The Vatican announced on November 21 that Pope Benedict XVI has named Spanish Archbishop Santos Abril y Castelló as the new archpriest of the Papal Basilica of St. Mary Major. The announcement made no reference to Law, who has served as archpriest since May 2004. Advocates for sexual abuse victims criticized the late Pope John Paul II for giving Law the prestigious post after his mishandling of clergy sexual abuse in Boston, which broke open abuse scandals that rocked the U.S. Catholic Church.

■ **Thomas W. Gillespie**, 83, a nationally active Presbyterian who was president of Princeton Theological Seminary for two decades after serving two long pastorates in his native California, died November 5 of complications from surgery earlier in the week. Gillespie, himself a Princeton seminary graduate, succeeded James McCord at Princeton in 1983 as president and also served as a professor of New Testament until his retirement in 2004. At his death, Gillespie was serving on the PCUSA General Assembly Mission Council. Earlier in his ministry, he was a member of the denomination's Task Force on Biblical Authority and Interpretation.

■ **George Gallup Jr.**, 81, whose interest in religion pushed the polling organization founded by his father toward more surveys of Americans' beliefs and practices as well as their political views, died November 21 in Princeton, New Jersey. After earning a B.A. in religion at Princeton University—and contemplating becoming an Episcopal priest—the younger Gallup joined the polling agency in 1954 and retired in 2004. Among his books about religion were *The Saints Among Us* (1992) and *The Next American Spirituality* (2002).

Alan Geyer, former CENTURY editor, dies

ALAN F. GEYER, 80, a widely published Christian ethicist and ecumenical leader and a former editor of the CHRISTIAN CENTURY, died November 28. Most recently he was canon ethicist at the Washington National Cathedral and professor of political ethics and ecumenics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

Geyer was editor of the CENTURY from 1968 to 1972. James Wall, who succeeded him as editor, said that Geyer brought to the magazine "a greater concentration on academic rigor." Wall added that Geyer tried to instill in readers "a sense of mission that went well beyond the local parish."

Before becoming CENTURY editor, Geyer was professor of political science at Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia, and director of international relations for the United Church of Christ, based at the Church Center for the United Nations.

Returning to academia and interdenominational relations in 1972, Geyer became the Dag Hammarskjöld Professor of Peace Studies and Political Science at Colgate University for five years. For a decade, ending in 1987, he served as the founding executive director of the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy in Washington, D.C., an ecumenical study center applying Christian values to public policy.

Geyer joined the faculty of Wesley Theological Seminary in 1987. From 1995 to 2005 he served the Washington National Cathedral in a variety of positions, including canon ecumenist and canon ethicist.

Geyer was born August 3, 1931, in Dover, New Jersey, where his father was a Methodist pastor. He earned degrees from Ohio Wesleyan University and Boston University School of Theology. His expertise in political analysis was reflected in his selection as primary author of the 1986 statement on nuclear disarmament by the United Methodist Council of Bishops, "In Defense of Creation."

He was the author or coauthor of 20 books, including *Piety and Politics* (1961), *The Idea of Disarmament: Rethinking the Unthinkable* (1982), *Redeeming the City: Theology, Politics and Urban Policy* (1982), *Lines in the Sand: Justice and the Gulf War* (1992), *Christianity and the Superpowers: Religion, Politics, and History in U.S.–U.S.S.R. Relations* (1990) and *Ideology in America* (1997).

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, January 1
Galatians 4:4–7

WITH ALL OF THE pressures of preparing for Christmas Day—the coming and going, the parties and presents—the Sunday following Christmas is welcome indeed. It's a time to stop, take a deep breath, keep one's slippers on a little longer and do nothing. There is good reason people traditionally refer to this Sunday as "Low Sunday," and good reason too that the lectionary writers chose St. Paul's treatise on the primacy of God's unconditional, unmerited, universal, relentless and eternal grace.

Imagine the leader of a major Christian institution declaring on CNN that from now on, before one can become a Christian, one must first become a Jew, submit to the ritual of circumcision and vow to abide by the disciplines of the Mosaic law. Even those who had become Christian Jews without circumcision would have to comply with the new requirements. For many viewers, the announcement would invoke ridicule and create a whole new flood of circumcision jokes. The thoughtfully religious, however, would reject the pronouncement as heresy. It would be heard as law taking precedence over grace.

That is precisely the cultural-religious context in which Paul found himself in Galatia. The Galatian church saw circumcision as a required act that validated one's faith; without it one could not be included.

Today the Galatian "heresy" remains a shadow that still hovers over much of modern religious rhetoric and practice. If not by precept but by implication and intimidation, couldn't we name baptism, confirmation, church attendance or perhaps even pledging as rituals that are necessary before one can be fully accepted?

In earlier days, it would not be uncommon for a minister to be summoned to the bedside of a dying relative with the request that the minister try to pry a confession of faith from the lips of the dying person. If only as a last gasp, the loved one would utter the name of Jesus, and a lost soul could be rescued from the pits of hell and awarded a heaven of eternal bliss. In modern times, the minister's dilemma often comes in the form of a request to conduct a funeral for someone who didn't belong to a church or didn't believe in God.

What's a minister to do? Are only those who are properly documented entitled to the full benefits of God's benevolent grace? What minister is bold enough or legalistic enough to claim that this grace, which God intended for the salvation of all humanity, is so fragile that it cannot stand up to human frailty and unbelief? Isn't a minister or a congregation under obligation to be as gracious to the "undeserving" as God has been gracious to them? Yet is it really fair to faithful, pledge-paying, churchgoing and Bible-reading congregants to offer the church's services to the uncertified?

The debate in the Galatian church is, of course, the theological tug-of-war between faith and works, between law and grace. Paul is adamant. All is grace. Grace is the foundational basis for the good news of the gospel message and the centerpiece of Christian theology. The only validation necessary has already taken place on the cross through the sacrificial and redemptive love of God in Christ. To make the point, Paul employs the human metaphor of family—not just the biological family but also the adoptive family. One who might not have belonged is now lovingly welcomed into the family to enjoy all the benefits of an heir. We are all sons and daughters of God, and thus unconditionally loved as sons and daughters of God. As with any adoption, none of it depends on the child doing anything. Adoption comes as a gift.

There is no more powerful a theological premise than the primacy of God's grace, which always precedes faith. Paul Tillich, who had a theological knack for making the mysterious simple, is never more Pauline than when he adamantly contends that we cannot transform our lives on our own. There is nothing we can or have to do. "It happens; or it does not happen. And certainly it does not happen if we try to force it upon ourselves, just as it shall not happen so long as we think, in our self-complacency, that we have no need of it." Rather, Tillich insists, grace comes as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted . . . by that which is greater than you. . . . Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted! If that happens to us, we experience grace . . . nothing is demanded of this experience, no religious or moral or intellectual presupposition, nothing but acceptance."

The text ends with Paul recognizing the difficulty of accepting God's unconditional grace when we know how undeserving we are. He presses the adoption metaphor further by insisting that God sends the certifying experience of the Spirit so that we can confidently address God as "Father." Be assured, Paul is not speaking of the Spirit as we speak of "Christmas spirit" in banter at parties and in shopping malls. Paul's contention is that through the gift of the Spirit of Christ still among us, we are given the power to accept others into the family in the same manner in which we ourselves have been adopted into the family of God.

As my seminary professor Felix Gear used to tell his students: "All is grace. Once that notion gets into your gizzard, life will never be the same again."

Sunday, January 9
Mark 1:4–11

YEARS AGO DURING the Christmas season, I was in the office of the inner-city congregation I served when the intercom buzzed. "There is a young man here who wants to see you," said the secretary. I knew what that meant. There were many homeless in the neighborhood, and they all asked for money, especially at Christmas. But the emergency relief office was closed, so I said, "Sure, show him in." He was not what I expected. He was neatly dressed, clean-shaven, in his late twenties. There was an air of dignity about him, with no glassy look and none of the usual signs of having been on the streets.

"Sorry to take your time," he apologized, "but I just want your blessing." He did not seem depressed or desperate but in good spirits, polite and very much in control. I attempted to explain that Presbyterians did not usually confer blessings, but the man was not there for a lesson in ecclesiology. "All I want is your blessing," he said again. With some theological misgivings, I agreed and asked his name. "Andy," he said, and knelt on the carpet while I offered a general prayer of thanksgiving for God's presence in Andy's life, an acknowledgment of the ways God had already blessed him and of God's continuing concern and purpose for him. When I said "Amen," Andy stood, smiled, shook my hand, thanked me and left.

Andy came to my office in search of some kind of blessing.

I still have no idea of the precise character of the blessing Andy sought. I sensed that it wasn't superficial absolution for some insignificant sin. He was struggling, seeking some assurance that his life counted, that it had some purpose he had not found or had lost touch with. In choosing one of God's anonymous representatives for a blessing, Andy was unknowingly mirroring what the psalmist identified as a thirst for God, and Augustine named "a restlessness of the soul." Academics and ordinary folk alike tell anecdotal tales of feeling abandoned, forgotten or not wanted. "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" is not exclusively an African-American gospel song. Human consensus validates a universal longing for parental approval.

Karl Barth referred to Jesus' baptism as a "summary of the essence of the gospel." The astounding epiphany, dramatized by the heavens opening and the Spirit descending as a dove, lies in the revelation that God is no longer hidden in the heavens but has become incarnate in the person of Jesus. All we need to know about God is now knowable in the character, purpose and grace of Jesus. Chrysostom placed more importance on Jesus' baptism than on his birth, contending that "he became manifest to all . . . when he was baptized." In the Elijah-like epiphany of Mark's baptism narrative, Jesus is who God says he is: "My beloved son." Connecting Mark's testimony with Paul's words (Gal. 4:4–7), we see that through Christ we too are sons and daughters of God by adoption.

In *Feasting on the Word*, Rodney Hunter describes the Jordan River epiphany as a psychological event that "realigns the individual into profound attunement with that which is highest and best in his or her universe of meaning and value." The epiphany (conversion, awakening) impelled Jesus to respond to John's call to repent and be baptized so that he emerged from the water with a vision of himself as one with a God-given identity and affirmation. It was through the baptismal event that Jesus perceived God's call into the wilderness, where he experienced a deep spiritual struggle and emerged as "a new man, by all appearances, with supernatural powers and a revolutionary spiritual message."

However one interprets the Jordan River account, the transformative words are, "You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased," arguably the most coveted words in human language. On the human level, they're heard as an affirmation of acceptance, pride and approval from a parent to a child. However, when Mark's account of Jesus' baptism is read through the eyes of Paul in Galatians, the words take on a significantly broader meaning. In *Feasting on the Word*, Lamar Williamson says that while the epiphany establishes Jesus' identity as the Son of God, it also establishes our identity as God's adoptive sons and daughters. It is precisely at times when we feel our own unworthiness that the text speaks to each of us. Without presuming divine identity with Jesus, we can affirm that we are all in our own unique and different ways children of God and joint heirs of God's promise of unconditional grace. The text is a blessed assurance as well as a mandate for living our lives as brothers and sisters to all who need the good news.

When I reflect on my encounter with Andy, I pray that he's realized that he is unconditionally one of God's precious children. That is the essence of our faith, which nobody has defined better than Paul Tillich in his insistence that faith is "the courage to accept acceptance."

The author is P. C. Enniss, *pastor emeritus at Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia.*

Ecologist Sandra Steingraber

How we're poisoning our children

SANDRA STEINGRABER has been sharing her passion for justice, her scientific knowledge and her concerns about environmental poisons since 1997, when she wrote of her struggle with cancer in Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment. *Her second book,* Having Faith, *combined an account of her own pregnancy with details about fetal toxicology. In her latest book,* Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis, *she describes the personal challenge of raising children in a time of acute environmental stress. Steingraber received one of the 2011 Heinz Awards for her "ability to make scientific research compelling to a wide audience." She lives in Ithaca, New York, and is a scholar in interdisciplinary and international studies at Ithaca College.*

One of the initial responses one has to your books is: "There is so much to worry about." It is hard not to feel despair and anxiety.

Yes, the despair question is the number one question I hear, and it is the biggest obstacle to social and environmental justice. The problems are very serious; our economy has become dependent on ruinously destructive practices. But what often prevents people from insisting that we do things in a more enlightened way is their own despair. They give up hope before they've even started.

I have discovered that laying out the case for harm is not sufficient. My task as a writer is to inspire people to become active. Despair is mitigated by action. This is a place where working with faith communities is particularly gratifying. Because of their history of social justice concerns, churches are often a little less prone to "a case of the vapors" than other groups. If I tell a group that something is a David and Goliath struggle, church groups will see the need to be David. The enormity of the situation doesn't give us permission not to try.

What led you to write *Raising Elijah*?

The book refers to one of my childhood heroes, Elijah Lovejoy, a Presbyterian minister well known to Illinois schoolchildren. In the 1830s, people invested in slaves to keep the cost of goods down and to allow the U.S. to compete in the global marketplace. These were economic arguments for keeping slavery, and they had traction. But when Lovejoy became a father, he saw the experience of slaves in another light: slave children were separated from their parents when they were sold, and he could feel the tremendous human cost. Lovejoy began to argue that slavery was a homicidal abomination that could not be abided. When he was threatened, he said that while he was willing to die at his post, he was not free to step aside. When he was assassinated by antiabolitionists in 1837, he had a two-year-old son, and his wife was pregnant with their second child.

Our economy is now ruinously dependent on fossil fuels. It is a homicidal abomination too, and we must find alternative ways to reimagine our economy. My son, now ten years old, was named after Elijah Lovejoy. He has a history of asthma, which is an environmentally influenced illness linked to exposure to vehicle exhaust and other forms of air pollution. Through my study of environmental science, I have learned that I can't protect my own child without confronting our nation's energy policy and transportation systems and without protecting the plankton in the ocean that produces the oxygen that he breathes.

"We are exposed to toxins without our consent."

I don't answer the despair factor by minimizing the direness of the situation; I answer by reminding people that there were other times in human history when the situation was dire, and people were called on to do big things. I am not asking people to recycle or change their lightbulbs—people get confused when we ask them to do small things because they intuitively know that the situation requires a bigger response.

History has not judged kindly those who sat by while fascism took over Europe. Those people are called, ironically, "good Germans." But others saw the early signs and took action. How do we want to see ourselves? Will we be good Germans or will we be members of the French Resistance?

How would you sum up the environmental crisis?

I see it as a tree with two trunks. One trunk is chemical trespass: the human rights violations that result when inherently dangerous substances are introduced into our common environment. We are exposed without consent, and our bodies become receptacles for harmful chemicals linked to cancer,

preterm births and fetal damage, among many other problems.

The other branch is climate change. This refers to the burning of fossil fuels that load up the atmosphere with heat-trapping gases, so much so that we are changing the climate system.

These two trunks are often dealt with by two separate groups of environmentalists. I am interested in bringing these two together. The trunks of the tree share a common root in our dependency on coal, oil and natural gas. All of the chemicals in the first category are produced from oil, coal and natural gas. Take vinyl shower curtains. Vinyl is a form of plastic made from vinyl chloride, a liver carcinogen to which workers in PVC manufacturing plants are exposed. Plasticizers are added to vinyl shower curtains to make them less prone to cracking. Plasticizers are linked to asthma, and emerging evidence suggests they also function as reproductive toxicants that can alter the development of the male reproductive tract during prenatal life.

If we could stop digging oil, coal and gas out of the ground and burning them and if we redesigned the energy economy, we would also redesign the materials economy. We often hear about how wind and solar might substitute for coal and natural gas, but renewable energy offers us much more than a different way to get our electricity. If green chemistry and green engineering can redesign the kinds of things we use in everyday life, then we will be addressing the common root of both trunks of the tree.

Are you encouraged by what you see in green chemistry and green engineering?

Biomimicry is an exciting field. It looks at the natural world and observes how the world does things, then derives solutions from what organisms have evolved to do. For example, scientists study organisms that have found ways to move very quickly through water. Using what they've learned, they've developed mechanisms for wind turbines. Another example is studying an organism that has developed ways to use the toxins it produces. Right now, we dump our toxic waste in people's communities, usually the communities of people who are poor and have little political power.

"My life as a cancer patient was my entrance point into environmental science."

The happiest example is organic farming. This is a tremendous success story. The old thinking was that we had to choose between high yields and poisoning the soil. Happily, that is no longer the case. The best science shows us that yields of organic farms are now on par with yields from conventional farms—or close to it—and organic farms outperform conventional, chemically dependent farms during periods of drought and climatic stress (which we are expecting more of). Organic farming, while still small, is now the fastest growing sector of agriculture, and it continued to grow after the economic downturn.



COURTESY DEDE HATCH

The other great thing about the success of organic farming is that there is a lot of overlap between the political and the personal. We all eat, and in doing so we can make choices about protecting ourselves and the land around us.

What motivated you to study environmental science?

I grew up in an industrial community in Illinois and was diagnosed with bladder cancer at age 20. The first question the doctor asked me was what environmental exposure to toxicants I had experienced. Had I ever worked in an aluminum smelter? Although I had never worked there, we had an aluminum smelter in my town. I soon learned that bladder cancer is considered the quintessential environmental cancer.

My life as a cancer patient was my entrance point into environmental science. Using a postdoctorate from Harvard, I went back to my hometown, where I uncovered a cancer cluster. One of the many things that struck me was how little the people who were being affected knew about their situation.

What should communities and individuals do?

My philosophy is to never tell anyone what to do as a result of what they learn from me. This has frustrated some readers, but it is crucial that individuals and communities answer this question for themselves. I work with very diverse groups. When I speak to a church group, for example, I do as much listening as I do talking. What are the environmental issues in their communities? What are their communities' passions?

For example, I worked with a college football team to

reduce the growth of mushrooms on sports fields. Mushrooms are dangerous for players because they are slippery and can cause knee injuries. Conventionally, they are sprayed with a fungicide, which endangers human reproductive functions. We found an alternative. I've worked with fashion designers who want to take on the dry cleaning industry, middle school girls who want toxin-free nail polish, and musicians who are worried about the depletion of tree species that provide the wood for their instruments.

I find that environmental issues can be significant unifiers. I work with both right-to-life groups and Planned Parenthood on powerful chemicals that cause preterm births, the leading cause of death among newborns. While I myself do not subscribe to the right-to-life groups' political philosophy, I recognize the organizations' genuine concern about the sanctity of fetal life. Planned Parenthood is also concerned; it sees this as a reproductive rights issue. Women are being exposed without their consent to chemicals that damage their unborn children.

Recently President Obama overrode EPA protections against smog pollution. What is the impact of this decision?

It is by far the worst decision this administration has made. Smog is formed when airborne chemicals such as evaporating paint fumes or vapors from natural gas wells combine—in the presence of sunlight—with tailpipe emissions from cars or diesel exhaust from trucks to make ozone. Ozone is a triangular molecule of oxygen and is a powerful cellular poison. You can't see ozone; when you see smog, the haze is caused by light rays that are bent as the light hits these molecules. Smog is not just a nuisance; it kills people—elders and infants disproportionately. It also has detrimental effects on pregnant women. Asthma, heart disease and stroke are some the effects of smog. It causes misery in families everywhere. In other words, this is not only about the landscape looking smudgy on a hot summer day.

> "Our children are made of air, water and food."

We have the technology to do things differently. Lisa Jackson, the EPA administrator who developed the smog standards, has a background in environmental justice. She is aware that one of the things dragging down our economy is medical care costs—often in those areas related to smog. She worked very hard on these standards and created a great path forward, only to see it thrown away. The administration's rationale was right out of the Tea Party playbook and extremely destructive.

What will be the result of the smog decision?

Children are going to suffer the most. As a parent, it is my job to protect my child from harm. If the air itself is causing my child harm, then I cannot do my job. There is an important tradition in religious activism of speaking truth to power. It is time for that now. But it is also time to speak truth to powerlessness. For me, this means going into communities where people are disproportionately affected and have very little understanding of what is happening. I share the science with them. This gives them power to address these issues in their own communities.

You often draw on religiously inflected language in your writing and speaking, as in *Raising Elijah*. What is your faith perspective?

I was adopted as an infant through the Methodist Church and attended church twice a week. The scriptural passages and hymns are part of how my brain is wired. I went to a Methodist college, but I then left Methodism behind me in a lot of ways. I have found a new spiritual home in the Quaker community. I find a lot of strength in the meetinghouses. I will often come to meeting right from the airport, having spoken

Job's blazon

A blazon is a poetic catalogue of a woman's physical beauty and virtues

My skin sinks in sackcloth.
Worry canyons me with wrinkles.
Gaunt, cleft-hewn, I am a monument
To my defeated,
Dying self.

My voice from my pleas is
Asundered. They are buried
In the mortuary of the dark.

I stumble in the season of night
On a path of briars, biers, thorns,
Pricking me into memory.

My body aches with time.
Every minute consumes endless seconds
As if I were a living cadaver
And the clock a hungry predator
Tearing my grey flesh from
My stale, lime-soaked bones.

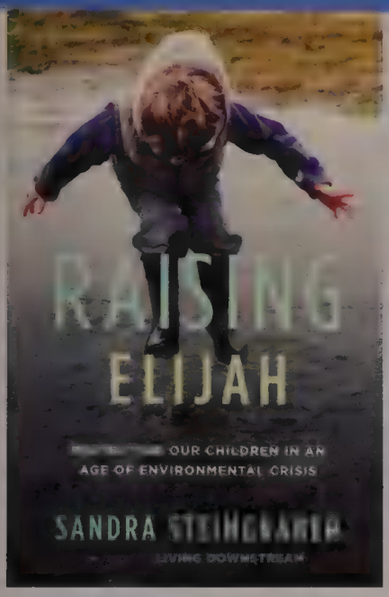
My veins shrink
Life deflated balloons,
Full once, now airless rubble.

Once I loved the sea,
Bathed in its giddy spray,
Tasted its salty liquor.
Today my tears burden
The waves overflowing with
My misery, with my misery.

Philip C. Kolin

somewhere about an environmental issue, and I sit on those benches struggling with the question of what difference my work has made. As I start to worship, I imagine Quakers before me who worked on the underground railroad at great danger to themselves or fought for women's rights or spoke out against nuclear weapons. This sense of history lets me imagine myself as one link in a very long chain of witnesses for social justice. The Friends' credo—faith in action—is at the center of my spiritual life, as is the notion that there exists something of God in everyone, which is the keystone idea that calls Quakers to pacifism. Because environmental destruction harms children and begets violence, working to protect the abiding ecology of the planet on which human life depends seems to me a consistent part of a larger commitment to peace.

We Quakers are called to seek out the sacred within the fellowship of ordinary life. I believe that in any given moment we humans enjoy an exquisite communion with creation, as molecules of our environment stream through us, break apart, rearrange themselves and become our bodies and our blood. Our children are made of air, water and food. The plankton stocks that make us oxygen, the bedrock that holds groundwater, the pollinating bees that make fruit: these are blessings. Chemical poisons should not trespass here. CC



Raising Elijah: Protecting Our Children in an Age of Environmental Crisis
by Sandra Steingraber
Da Capo Press, 368 pp., $26.00

Let's talk about **toxins**

IT'S TIME FOR THE TALK, says Sandra Steingraber. No, not the talk about the birds and the bees—although as a parent she knows about that one too. It's time, she says, for the talk about the pollutants that are infiltrating our lives and threatening the health of all of us, especially our children. The sex ed talk is actually much like the environmental ed talk, Steingraber says:

> The two tales shared a common epistemological challenge: They are both counterintuitive. In the former case, you have to accept that your ordinary existence began with an extraordinary, unthinkable act. In the latter case, you have to accept that the collective acts of ordinary objects—cars, planes, dishwashers—are ushering in things extraordinary and unthinkable.

Among the extraordinary and unthinkable things one learns from *Raising Elijah* is that the pressed wood used to construct decks and playground equipment was, up until 2004, sealed with arsenic. "We can't yet prove how arsenic causes cancer and diabetes," writes Steingraber, "but we know that it's involved. And we know that when we test the soil under our kids' playgrounds, we're measuring arsenic at unacceptable levels." Children, who are especially susceptible to toxins, pick up the poison on their hands as it dissolves in the rain.

Steingraber also tells us about mercury and how the burning of coal creates methylmercury (40 percent of industrial mercury emissions come from the burning of coal) and puts mercury into water. A 2009 survey of U.S. streams found mercury in every single fish tested. Mercury in children is associated with loss of IQ, forgetfulness, attention deficits and loss of balance. Instead of stopping production of this poison at its source, we warn pregnant women and children to limit their fish intake (especially tuna). Given the otherwise outstanding benefits of fish as a food source, asks Steingraber, why are we burning coal at all?

Steingraber's first book, *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood* (2001), combined a chronicle of pregnancy with reports on toxicology. She continues to write about science in a way that nonscientists can appreciate, interspersing scientific material with snapshots of her family and descriptions of her own efforts to eliminate toxins from the air her children breathe and the food they eat. Her work is on a par with David Quammen's marvelous book *The Song of the Dodo* (a mix of science writing and travel writing) or the medical detective stories of Oliver Sacks. Her chapter titles suggest the liveliness of her approach: "Pizza (and Ecosystem Services)" and "Homework (and Frontiers in Neurotoxicology)."

It's still a frightening read. I was tempted to put the book down several times but kept returning because of the author's passion not only for the health of children but for the intricacies of nature, the human body and family life.

Once you've heard "the talk" from Steingraber, you can begin to sort through the befuddling mess of chemical pollution with increased confidence and courage. You'll also know how to make some immediate changes in your lifestyle. Start gardening. Air dry your clothes (a clothes dryer sends 1,369 pounds of carbon dioxide a year into the atmosphere; drying clothes indoors in winter adds humidity to the air). Switch to a manual, non-gasoline-powered lawnmower and call the work aerobic exercise. Become an advocate for the environment and fight with Steingraber for measures that reduce the toxins in our food, air, water and playgrounds.

—Debra Bendis

Holy listening

by Amy Frykholm

WHEN ANGELA REED was in seminary, she found her studies intellectually stimulating, but she felt that something was missing. Seminary life involved "a great deal of talk of how we know about God, but almost nothing of knowing God, and that grated on my soul," Reed recalls. When she heard about an opportunity to meet with a spiritual director, she jumped at the chance.

Reed began meeting with a Roman Catholic woman who invited her to watch for the presence of God in everyday life. A typical session included a period of silence, some kind of spiritual practice, and time to reflect on what she had been experiencing lately in prayer and in life. Her director suggested practices that pushed Reed to explore new ways of relating to God. At one point, the director encouraged Reed to use hand motions in prayer—a kind of "body prayer." That practice was at first uncomfortable for Reed, but she tried it. By this time, she trusted her director and knew that the relationship was moving her toward a deeper relationship with God, a relationship that knit together her body, mind and heart, her thinking and her actions.

Reed is now a seminary professor herself, at Truett Seminary in Waco, Texas, and she has a special interest in the place of spiritual guidance for congregations and for seminary students.

"It is my hope that seminary students can receive the spiritual nurture they need while they also learn to interpret scripture, understand theology and prepare for the tasks of ministry," Reed says.

Cherri Johnson found her way to spiritual direction through an unexpected experience. She had been involved as a lay volunteer in nearly every facet of Methodist church life. One day, while working as a counselor at a church camp, certain words formed in her mind: "Come, rest in the sweet water of Babylon." The phrase was intriguing but baffling. "Sweet water" was not a part of her religious lexicon. She knew "living water," but what was "sweet water"? And what was sweet about Babylon? From what she knew of scripture, Babylon was a place of captivity and exile. Why were these words encouraging her to come and rest there? The words stayed with her. She read scripture with the words in mind and talked to her pastor about them.

After several months, she decided she needed to talk to somebody who was more familiar with this kind of experience. She got in touch with an Episcopal priest who had been trained in spiritual direction at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington, D.C. Through him she learned about contemplative prayer and about spiritual direction—ancient practices designed to help Christians attend to the work of the Holy Spirit in individual and corporate life. Johnson learned Ignatian prayer techniques and *lectio divina*—reading and praying with the scripture and with the heart and body and not only the mind; she learned to sit in silence with God and wait for the quiet stirring of the spirit. (She eventually concluded that the "sweet waters" were the divine presence at work in the community of faith and in all things.)

Spiritual direction may be of special importance for pastors.

Johnson's experience made her want to be trained as a spiritual director herself. But she couldn't find any resources available in her home state of Louisiana. Her interests led her to help establish the Spiritual Direction Training Program with the Academy for Spiritual Leadership, a part of the Louisiana conference of the United Methodist Church. She graduated with the first class in 2001 and has served as a small group supervisor for students for ten years.

Johnson's next project was to try to inject the practices of spiritual direction that she found so valuable into the life of a congregation. "I can't be the only Methodist who ever had a spiritual experience," she would joke with parishioners. She found that church members knew the language of discipleship and the practices of stewardship, Bible study, mission and fellowship, but the language of spiritual direction was foreign to them.

She began by offering congregation members what she knew best: one-on-one spiritual direction and experiences of contemplative worship. Since 2003, her initial approach has developed into a large and dynamic ministry that includes workshops and classes, one-on-one and group mentoring, retreats, contemplative worship and the integration of creative spirituality and the arts in congregational life.

Johnson says that the spiritual practices she discovered are

lost elements of Methodism itself. Many spiritual practices familiar to Methodist founder John Wesley were eclipsed as Methodists gradually started focusing more on information than on formation. The inner journey of faith was superseded by a commitment to doctrinal certainties. The practice of spiritual direction offers a means to recapture a lost dimension of Christian life.

"This movement," Johnson said, "is the groaning of the Spirit in the church today. If you listen, you can hear the birthing."

Reed's and Johnson's stories are indeed part of a movement. Over the past two decades, the practice of spiritual direction has become an increasingly regular part of mainline Protestant spirituality. Reed and Johnson are two of more than 6,000 members of Spiritual Directors International (SDI), an organization that seeks to expand resources for what its president, Liz Budd Ellmann, calls the "ancient human experience" of offering spiritual aid and counsel.

The dramatic growth of SDI illustrates the trend: it had about 1,200 members in 1995 and about 6,000 by 2005, and it expects to have over 10,000 by 2016. Catholic sisters are still the group's single largest bloc of members, but the traditions represented range from Quaker to mainline Protestant to Roman Catholic to Orthodox to non-Christian.

While many members of SDI are laypeople, more and more pastors have made spiritual direction a central part of their ministries. The spirituality shaped by spiritual direction might be of special importance to pastors, Reed observes, because the demands of ministry are such that pastors often function out of a "false self." They may put on masks to hide

Spiritual direction is not about what a person does, it's about who a person is.

their true struggles and opinions rather than risk displeasing those they serve. For many pastors, that false self becomes habitual, and they lack a safe place in which to take off the mask.

Spiritual direction offers a way to attend to God's presence in one's life in the context of a trusted relationship. Spiritual direction "is not about what we do, but about who we are," says Reed. "It helps us see how we've been operating falsely and begins to move us to the center."

In her research on pastors trained in spiritual direction, Reed notes that the practice often becomes more than an element of ministry. It informs and shapes the whole of it. The practice of spiritual direction informs the way ministers preach and the kind of questions they ask parishioners at coffee hour. It influences how they run meetings and when or if they refer parishioners to counseling.

Reed tells the story of one pastor who early in his ministry



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was driven simultaneously by the desire to please others and the desire to control them. Through spiritual direction, he gradually came to understand that "the Holy Spirit is already at work in every human being to fulfill God's purposes." This insight allowed him to work with others and himself with greater patience and clarity.

The rise of spiritual direction among Protestants got a big push in the mid-1990s when the Association of Theological Schools added spiritual formation as a category to be considered in the process of accrediting seminaries. At the time, according to ATS executive director Daniel Aleshire, seminaries were realizing that students lacked the kind of faith formation in congregations and denominational traditions that could have been assumed in the past. Some members of ATS felt that the new standards needed to reflect this transformed reality. Ministry, they argued, is not simply a matter of the well-formed brain.

Not all theological educators agreed. Some contended that whatever the state of students' faith development, faith formation was the work of churches, not seminaries, and it was not wise to ask seminaries to do something that other institutions should be doing. Both points of view remain well represented in ATS seminaries, Aleshire said.

In the end, ATS standards simply required that some attention be given to spiritual formation. That decision sent seminaries searching for appropriate programs.

Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., for example, developed a program that encourages students to be part of covenant groups. Other schools developed courses and course materials on formation. Other institutions followed models of formation that had long been in place at Catholic

institutions, including the practice of individual spiritual direction. Princeton Seminary offered spiritual direction in small groups, and it now offers both group and individual direction free of charge through the student health program.

Unlike pastoral counseling, spiritual direction does not draw directly on the disciplines of psychology and psychotherapy, though in some cases it is closely aligned with those disciplines. Many churches have begun spiritual direction centers or have included spiritual direction in the organization of pastoral counseling centers.

Joyce Krajian, the director of the Middleton Center, a pastoral counseling center connected with Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania, does not see pastoral counseling and spiritual direction as conflicting pursuits. At the center, Krajian seeks to determine whether a client is a better candidate for spiritual direction or counseling by listening closely to the nature of the questions a person is asking. At times, direction and counseling work together, and at times it is clear that a person belongs in one program or the other.

Unlike pastoral counseling, spiritual direction is primarily about the work of God in the present moment. It is not about understanding family dysfunction or psychological pain. If someone's primary question, whatever their struggle, is "Where is God in this?" then Krajian refers that person to a spiritual director, not a pastoral counselor.

The Middleton Center has a plethora of programs and resources available to the church, but 90 percent of the center's clients for both counseling and direction come from outside the congregation. Ellie Stratton, a spiritual director at the center, said that many people still wonder: How does spiritual direction fit in with the traditional activities of church? How do spiritual directors communicate the value of prayer and meditation to busy congregants?

The term *director* is misleading—the direction comes from the Spirit.

That question is widespread, said Ellmann, president of SDI. Spiritual directors have to work at explaining their programs and making them visible to the congregation. SDI has developed a button for spiritual directors to wear at coffee hour that says, "Ask me about spiritual direction."

Because spiritual direction resembles pastoral counseling in some ways, questions of credentialing often arise. But there is no general agreement on how to define what spiritual direction is and who should (or should not) engage in it. Spiritual Directors International is a central organization for the movement, but it does not issue credentials.

Different religious traditions have different ways of understanding who a director is and what that person does. The term *director* is itself a problem. Ellmann said that in describing what they do, spiritual directors often use the image of three chairs in a room: one chair belongs to the seeker, one to the director and one to the Holy Spirit. The actual "direction" is done by the Holy Spirit, not the director. For this reason, some have preferred to speak of companionship or accompaniment rather than direction. The director is simply someone who aids in the process of holy listening.

Whether or not to get involved in credentialing has been a subject of controversy within SDI. So far it has rejected that path and offered only a code of ethics. Some denominations have established their own credentialing programs so that they can have some control over who presents himself or herself as a spiritual director. This move provides some protection from radical individualism and from those who would declare that they have a gift in spiritual direction without its being acknowledged by a community. Certificate programs and cur-

Arise!

A tiny thing that isn't tiny at all;
How very many things like that
There are—this time flying ants
Rising like orange souls an inch
Long from the salal bushes here
Near the beach. A hundred arise
And then I stop counting. Arise!
A tiny spider snags one and they
Battle furiously for nine minutes
And then I stop counting. Poems
About death are so, well, deadly,
Aren't they? Think of the young
Spiders, thrilled at the full larder.
For so long we are so hungry for
Meaning; then we begin to get it
That not understanding is indeed
An understanding—and there are
As many understandings as there
Are ants evading the early swifts.
I don't mean ignorance, which is
A shape of selfish, or deliberately
Not knowing, which is insecurity
Hidden by an adamant insistence
On keeping your mind shut tight,
So often religious—why *is* that?
I mean a knowing beneath details
And fact and the whirl of ecology.
It isn't that I don't *want* to know;
I'm the biggest curiosity nut ever.
It's that I am starting to see many
More ways to see. Ants are rising.
What species, why? I don't know.
But look at the orange life! Arise!

Brian Doyle

ricula also answer the question, "What do I need to do to become a director?"

Ellmann noted that there is pressure toward professionalization in American society. People look for signs of training and credentials. In the case of spiritual direction, said Ellmann, they should be looking for a leading of the Spirit.

"Sometimes when it comes to spiritual direction, people think that a professional is going to be a better holy listener than a grandmother, and that isn't always the case," said Ellmann.

A review of Angela H. Reed's *Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations* is on p. 39

While holy listening might be a charism, a gift of the spirit, it does need a supporting structure. SDI encourages those who offer spiritual direction to be receiving direction at the same time. No one achieves the status of not needing direction anymore; the Spirit is always active, and everyone needs help listening.

Duane Bidwell, professor of practical theology at Claremont School of Theology, underscores the need for an interlocking, if informal, network of accountability. If someone were simply to declare herself a director and hang out a shingle in a church, Bidwell would ask, "Who are you accountable to in this practice? Who do you check in with to make sure you are observing appropriate boundaries, that you are not doing harm? How do you distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of yourself or the culture? What is your prayer life like?"

In this way, despite its focus on the "inward journey," those involved in spiritual direction seek to combat the self-oriented spirituality of contemporary culture. In both its philosophy and practice, spiritual direction suggests that the individual self is insufficient as a locus of meaning. No one can "do" spiritual direction by herself. While it may be the work of an individual to determine what the Holy Spirit is saying, the work cannot be done alone. It requires connection and community.

For this reason, pastors who are involved in spiritual direction—as both recipients and providers—find themselves immersed in spiritual friendships and companionships. And that experience can be transformative. United Methodist bishop William Hutchinson of the Louisiana Conference (home to the Academy for Spiritual Leadership) observes that the growth of spiritual direction among clergy in his area has had a significant, if subtle, impact. Clergy who are actively engaged in spiritual direction tend to be "less reactionary, less judgmental, more centered, more reflective. They search for deeper answers."

For many involved in this movement, spiritual direction is a crucial resource for the church today. With its attention to the inward journey, it attends to a widespread craving for authentic spirituality, but without pandering to the vagaries of consumer culture. It strengthens individual commitments while fostering deeper communities. CC

ESSENTIAL BOOKS ON spiritual direction

***The Art of Spiritual Direction,* by W. Paul Jones (2002).** Jones, formerly a Methodist theologian, now a Trappist monk and Catholic priest, draws on both the Wesleyan and Catholic traditions. He offers a broad history of spiritual direction, outlines what happens in the practice and suggests how to choose a spiritual director. Included are helpful appendices on spirituality and the Myers Briggs Type Inventory, the enneagram and family systems theory, and other topics.

***Holy Listening,* by Margaret Guenther (1992).** Beautifully and simply written, *Holy Listening* uses the theme of hospitality and the images of a teacher and midwife to the soul to describe the role of spiritual directors. She concludes with a chapter on women and spiritual direction.

***The Practice of Spiritual Direction,* by William A. Barry and William J. Connolly (2009).** Two priests draw on insights from modern psychotherapy, focusing on religious experience, not knowledge, as the locus of spiritual direction. They include chapters on what can go wrong in the director-directee relationship and on the importance of supervision for directors.

***Sacred Companions,* by David G. Benner (2004).** The author covers spiritual friendship, spiritual direction and group spiritual direction, discussing the characteristics, challenges and possibilities of each activity. Spiritual direction is a journey that leads toward making humans whole and holy. An extensive, annotated bibliography is included.

***Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction,* by Alice Fryling (2008).** Group spiritual direction is increasingly seen as an important approach, one that lends itself to the formation of congregation-based groups. Fryling provides practical help on how to start, lead and participate in spiritual direction groups and how to be sensitive to different personalities within them.

—*Richard A. Kauffman.* For more books and resources on spiritual direction, go to www.christiancentury.org.

Adopt a settlement

by Elizabeth Phillips

PALESTINIAN President Mahmoud Abbas went to the United Nations in September seeking member status for a Palestinian state that would be configured along the pre-1967 borders. One of the primary reasons the Palestinians took their case to the UN instead of working through the negotiated peace process is the ongoing establishment of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

In May, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reasserted his country's unwillingness to consider the 1967 lines as a viable border between Israel and a future Palestinian state: "While Israel is prepared to make generous compromises for peace, it cannot go back to the 1967 lines, because these lines are indefensible; because they don't take into account certain changes that have taken place on the ground." Israeli settlements are the primary "changes that have taken place on the ground."

In creating those settlements, Israeli settlers have been aided over the past four decades by Christian Zionists in the U.S. Between 2005 and 2009 I researched one such settlement —which most of the world considers illegal—and the support it receives from American Christians.

The settlement of Ariel began in 1978 when a group of Israelis led by Ron Nachman arrived by helicopter on a West Bank hilltop and slept in tents. Today Ariel has over 19,000 residents. Nachman became the city's first elected mayor in 1985 and has been repeatedly reelected ever since.

Ariel and the bloc of settlements nearby are "consensus communities," clusters of settlements that both Israeli and American leaders think should remain part of Israel in any final settlement with a Palestinian state. In this regard, Ariel is both strategically important and particularly controversial. Ariel is situated almost 13 miles beyond the 1967 border. What Israelis call their security fence dips deep inside the West Bank to surround Ariel. Netanyahu declared in January 2010 that Ariel is the "capital of Samaria" and an "integral part of Israel."

For most of its history, Ariel has benefited from the financial assistance of evangelical Christians. Ron Nachman first grasped the potential for such partnerships in the 1980s, when he met Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. After visiting with Eckstein, Nachman concluded that Israel cannot survive without seeking support from non-Jews, and Eckstein pointed him to the most eager non-Jewish supporters of Israel in the world: American Christian Zionists.

Nachman and the staff of the Ariel Development Fund have since cultivated friendships with a number of Christian groups and congregations. Ariel receives about 15 visits each year from various Christian Zionist groups. Nachman and Dina Shalit, the Development Fund director, have been guests at several events honoring Israel at American churches, including John Hagee's Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas. Nachman strongly prefers these occasions to visiting American synagogues. He says that in synagogues he gets a lot of questions; in churches he gets big checks.

Shalit told me that Christian Zionist support for Ariel is "of mammoth importance." Because official government funding of settlements is restricted by law, Ariel depends on funding from American Christians to make the settlement more like a city than an outpost. "There are many practical services we would not have without their contributions. We would have a drastically reduced quality of life."

Christian Zionists are the most eager non-Jewish supporters of Israel.

Ariel has the feel of a young, thriving suburb. The youth of Ariel can receive their entire education inside the settlement, with its multiple preschools, elementary schools, junior high schools, high school and college (renamed "Ariel University Center of Samaria" in 2007 in an attempt to claim the status of university, which most government officials are unwilling to grant to a college in a settlement). The city has a shopping center, medical clinics, a public swimming pool, an extensive central park, a community center, a cultural and performing arts center and a sports and recreation complex. Over 100 small factories occupy Ariel's industrial park.

Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC) organizes partnerships between American Christians and settlements like Ariel. CFOIC was born in 1995, when a Christian couple visited Israel and shared with a lawyer friend how disturbed

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AP PHOTO / ARIEL SCHALIT

***WEST BANK SETTLEMENT:** Ariel, a city of 19,000, is one of the largest Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. It receives financial and moral support from Christians in the U.S.*

they were by the Oslo Accords, particularly the call for Israel to withdraw from Gaza and the West Bank. The couple was Ted and Audrey Beckett, wealthy real estate developers based in Colorado Springs. Their lawyer friend suggested that they contact Nachman, who had organized a development fund in response to the Oslo Accords' freeze on government aid money going to settlements.

In its early days, the Ariel Development Fund focused on raising money from American Jews. The Becketts established CFOIC as a parallel organization to raise support for settlements from Christians. Part of the original vision of CFOIC was to link Christian churches with Israeli settlements through an adopt-a-settlement program. The first church approached about adopting a settlement was Faith Bible Chapel of Arvada, Colorado. It agreed to adopt Ariel.

Eventually CFOIC expanded beyond the Becketts' vision and focused on raising funds from individual churches for specific projects rather than on settlement adoption. Many of CFOIC's projects address the needs of children, providing playgrounds, scholarships, after-school programs, and counseling services. Other projects involve equipment for volunteer security and emergency response teams or provide relocation, construction and agricultural assistance for the "Gush Katif refugees"—settlers removed from Gaza when Israel withdrew in 2005.

CFOIC also participates in more controversial efforts, such as fund-raising in 2007 to erect temporary structures in Maskiot, where the Israeli government suspended plans for permanent buildings; these structures allowed the settlement to continue its existence until the building ban was lifted.

CFOIC has headquarters in Colorado Springs and in the West Bank settlement of Karnei Shomron, with offices in Germany and Holland, and representatives in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Bulgaria. Kimberly Troup, who directs the Colorado Springs headquarters, described CFOIC's aims for the *New York Times* in 2010: "The more that we build, the more that we support and encourage their right to live in the land, the harder it's going to be for disengagement, for withdrawal."

CFOIC's Israel headquarters is directed by Sondra Oster Baras, an Orthodox Jew who grew up in Cleveland and studied law at Columbia University. She and her husband immigrated to Israel 1984, and she soon became a pro-settlement activist. She became director of CFOIC in 1998. A dynamic speaker appearing often in American media, Baras has publicly rejected the peace process, saying that it is "a process to weaken Israel, to deprive it of its most important assets, and to bring Israel to a point of defeat." When I asked her what sort of process would bring peace, she replied, "Oh, an absolute reversal of everything we've seen today. Israel needs to be a lot more aggressive."

Baras was also very frank about her differences with the evangelical Christians from whom she raises funds. She knows that they believe Jews should, and at least some eventually will, accept Jesus as the Messiah. "I'm convinced that they're wrong. They're convinced that I'm wrong. OK. We can leave it in God's hands." Beliefs about the conversion of Jews are irrelevant as long as Christians don't act on those beliefs and try to evangelize Jews.

Her view is shared by all the Jewish partners of American Zionist groups whom I met. Ideological agreement on issues of

Israeli security and settlements trumps theological disagreements about the identity of the Messiah, whether he is about to come again or for the first time, and precisely what will happen in Israel when he arrives.

Nachman is pragmatic when it comes to tapping the generosity of Christian Zionists, who often speak of the promise in Genesis 12:3 that those who bless Israel will be blessed. "They don't do it because of us," he told me. "They do it for their own benefit." For Nachman this is unproblematic. "If we agree with their ideology, I don't see why not to strengthen it."

As CFOIC has shifted its focus away from settlement adoption and toward funding specific projects, the adoption of Ariel by Faith Bible Chapel took on a life of its own, independent of CFOIC.

Faith Bible Chapel has "had a hand in almost every facet of community life," one Ariel resident told me. The church's first gift was an ark for Torah scrolls. Since then donations have included medical equipment, items needed in the schools, college scholarships and contributions to community projects, including a Holocaust museum, the sports and recreation center and improvements to soldiers' accommodations.

Faith Chapel has also planted a vineyard on a hill in Ariel. Most Christian groups that visit the settlement plant vines in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:5, which says, "Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit."

Ideological agreement trumps theological disagreement.

Christians have also endowed Ariel's Child Development Center. Originally built with a grant from the Milken Family Foundation of Los Angeles, the center now covers approximately 20 percent of its operating costs with donations from Faith Chapel. The center provides speech, occupational and physical therapies, as well as tutoring for children with learning disabilities and psychological services. Services are provided for children with congenital problems as well as those suffering from traumas, including the trauma of enduring terrorism.

"When we adopted Ariel," remembers Cheryl Morrison, leader of Faith Chapel's Israel Outreach ministry and wife of its pastor, "we asked the Lord, 'What do you want us to do there?' And the scripture came to me when Jesus said, 'When you've done it to the least of these, my brethren, you've done it to me.' So we said, 'Who would be the least in Ariel?' And it would be the children who have emotional, physical and learning disabilities."

In the words of one couple in Ariel, the people of Faith Chapel "don't just leave their money. They get involved." Whenever a group from the congregation visits Israel, it includes a visit to Ariel. When youth groups from the congregation take sightseeing tours of Israel, they do volunteer work in Ariel and spend time with the local teens.

Members of Faith Chapel also attend to Ariel's political agenda. Many in Ariel, Faith Chapel and the CFOIC opposed the construction of the security fence, seeing it as a denial that all of Judea and Samaria are the rightful property of the state of Israel. However, when it became clear that the barrier would be built, Ariel people wanted to be on the Israeli side of it. Members of Faith Chapel contacted the municipal offices in Ariel to let them know that they were lobbying for the barrier to go around Ariel. Nachman often quips, "I don't call it a wall or a fence around Ariel. I call it a gated community."

For about 30 years Faith Chapel has also sent a group called the Internationals on a summer performance tour of military bases in Israel, carrying the message that God has chosen Israeli soldiers and blesses what they are doing and that there are Christians who love and support them. Being a member of this performance group requires extraordinary commitment

Stocking for the storm

I can hear thunder grind against the earth,
vibrate with imprecations. Nature's
tossing down her gauntlet,
promising extended sieges,
threatening to lock us in tragedy
the way she locks a fly in amber,
so I flee to the store, wanting to lay in
plenty. Entering the bright
delirium, I harvest cans of gumbo
and chowder, embrace beets
and turnips who've repented living
as fanged roots. I gather wheat
in tiny wheels of pasta, while a stock boy
wipes his hands on his blue apron
and reaches crackers for a child,
and the scarf lady summons me
to read a label. Mark this,
the inauspicious aisle where
we have met. I say, build an altar.
Let the sideshow of breads praise
our communion. Let chèvre
and camembert commemorate
the place where we say to one another,
Three inches! We're in for it now!
and other liturgies of festive panic.
Because soon enough the thunder
will take back its fulminations,
black clouds break from their huddle,
wheel and gallop off, leaving us shy
and silent, wondering what that holy
moment meant, what this altar signifies,
the brief joy strangers gave to one another.

Jeanne Murray Walker

and dedication. The members practice throughout the year. Israeli coaches help them perfect their song choices, choreography and Hebrew pronunciation. They are also given lectures and reading assignments, such as *In Defense of Israel*, by John Hagee.

Each annual tour includes about 13 performances. The shows include a dozen or so songs with a costume change for every number (black satin Hasidic costumes for a folk dance, *Fiddler on the Roof* costumes for "L'chaim," fluorescent T-shirts and white capri pants for a modern Israeli pop song and Israeli military uniforms for a military tribute).

Several of the performers, and even their parents, told me they believed they could die on this tour, and it would be worth it. The youngest of the dancers, a 16-year-old on tour for the first time, said he thought they would be safe because they were doing this for God. "But if we're not," he said, "I'm ready to go." A staff member who tours with the group and is the mother of former and current performers mentioned that her daughter and son-in-law had recently prepared a will, naming legal guardians for their two-year-old twins, because they were about to go on the tour. This grandmother concluded, unflinchingly: "If we don't come home, we don't come home, and it will have been worth it."

Christian Zionists believe that they are obeying a commandment given by God.

One mother who went on the tour as a chaperone summed up why the congregation believes the tour is so important. She could barely speak of the experience without crying. "The thing that really was amazing to me was watching these average kids, you know, these kids that I know . . . and they go there and they bless these soldiers who are defending this land . . . just these average, middle-class, Christian kids blessing the apple of God's eye, you know? Defending the land that God gave them."

While the Internationals take the message of God's blessing to the Israeli military, a similar group of young people from Ariel, named For Zion's Sake, takes messages of gratitude and further need for support to American Christians. While on tour, Shalit introduces the group's western dance number by comparing the pioneering spirits of the American West and the West Bank. "In the U.S. it was settlers who built the country, spreading the borders past the original 13 colonies. Your history, however, only reflects admiration for the settlers who moved west, and with visions of a manifest destiny created a free and democratic USA from sea to shining sea."

Shalit was contrasting the American view of settlers with that of most of the world, including many Israelis who view Israeli settlers as second-class citizens and dangerous zealots. This sense of isolation and rejection takes a toll on the young people of the settlements, and by the time they reach their teen years many of the youth in Ariel feel no connection to the settlement project or to Judaism; they want out of the West Bank.

For some of these teens, a sort of conversion occurs when they encounter American Christian Zionists. The 2007 visit of For Zion's Sake to Faith Bible Chapel coincided with Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day. The Israeli teens arrived at the church to find the Internationals outside waving Israeli flags and bearing gifts. They were then ushered into the church's prayer chapel for a special ceremony remembering fallen Israeli soldiers. Names were read aloud of those who died in the 2006 Lebanon conflict, and a candle was lit for each one.

Those who work with the teens of Ariel describe interactions like this as life-changing. When the teens encounter people saying, "You are chosen by God. God has not forsaken your people. God chose you to settle the land he promised to Abraham. We love you unconditionally and support your right to the land," they feel loved and confident and have a new interest in Judaism and new commitment to Israel, military service and the settlement movement.

Many people think of Christian Zionists as believing that they can hasten Jesus' return by their support of the state of Israel. Books on Christian Zionism often have fiery images and titles referring to Armageddon.

But the Christian Zionists I met are not focused on the end times. One of the favorite songs at Faith Chapel is based on Genesis 12:3. The song says, "I will bless those who bless my people. I will curse those who curse them too. For this I have promised to my servant Abraham. I will keep my word." There is no question that Christian Zionists like those at Faith Chapel are "blessing" Israeli settlers in terms of improving the quality of their lives and their morale. It is also clear that they do so out of a genuine sense that they are both obeying a commandment given by God and cooperating with God's work today. Believing that God's ultimate plans for world peace, prosperity and joy will be realized when God's kingdom is established in Israel, they are prepared to support the occupation and violence in the Middle East, which they believe precedes the establishment of God's kingdom.

Can any true "blessing" come from such a troubling reading of scripture? Even assuming uncritical support for the state of Israel, does such support for the settlements help or harm Israel's long-term security and flourishing? Christian Zionists seek to bless Israel and to curse those they believe are cursing Israel, like the United Nations and the Obama administration. But are they "cursing" Israel themselves by damaging long-term interests and impeding the peace process?

To Christian Zionists, questions like these are irrelevant. Their concern is not ultimately with the coming decades of Israel's nationhood but the coming of Christ to establish his eternal kingdom. Although they know that their activism will not make Christ return any sooner, they believe that by supporting Israel they are assured of being on the right side of the battle lines when he does come. CC



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Faith MATTERS

by Carol Zaleski

Saved by Tintin

FROM WHERE I SIT at the family dinner table my eyes fall on a tall bookcase, on top of which, just under a map of Narnia, a crowd of small resin figures seems to be in perpetual motion. One of them, the diva Bianca Castafiore, is singing the "Jewel" aria from Gounod's *Faust*, but if she is not run over by two detectives in bowler hats driving a green 1926 Citroën 5HP, she will soon be knocked down by Professor Calculus walking in an intellectual trance, or by Captain Haddock pacing the deck. Interspersed among these characters, smaller than the rest, yet the reason for their very existence, is Tintin, the young reporter, standing in his blue sweater and brown plus fours before a preternaturally large Amanita muscaria mushroom, scaling a craggy cliff in kilt and tam, trekking in a pith helmet and khaki shorts, crouching in a porcelain vase with his white terrier Snowy.

Down in the basement—but we've just carted them upstairs to get reacquainted—are the 23 original Tintin books we've collected over the past three decades. When we first discovered Tintin, while studying abroad in Paris, he was almost unknown in the U.S. We liked to think of him as our private enthusiasm. All that has changed: with the release of the Stephen Spielberg and Peter Jackson film, Tintin belongs to the world.

The creator of Tintin, Georges Remi—whose initials, reversed, produced the pen name Hergé—was the brightest star of the Franco-Belgian school of cartoon illustration (*bandes dessinées*). Hergé pioneered what he called the *ligne claire* (clear line), strong black outlines without shading or crosshatching, illuminated like a book of hours by layers of flat, saturated color. Each object has a similar value, whether it is the wake of a ship, a line of prayer flags or a bottle of whiskey concealed in Captain Haddock's pocket. There is plenty of movement, but nothing hectic or extraneous. While disciples of Hergé have used the clear line method for ironic effect (*Where's Waldo?* is a good example), in Hergé's hands it suggests moral clarity. One has only to look at Tintin, his round face animated by the simplest imaginable features, to know that he is Pure Heart (as the high lama calls him in *Tintin in Tibet*), defender of the weak and downtrodden, loyal, resilient, ever youthful, endlessly cheerful and tolerant of the foibles of his eccentric friends, never cowed by evil—the ultimate Boy Scout.

One would like to think that Tintin's creator shared all these qualities. Artists don't have to be saints to be able to portray them, but they do need to have at least a spark of sainthood to get it right. Georges Remi's case, however, is complicated. He grew up in German-occupied Brussels, where home life was, he said, a "monochrome gray." He received his moral formation in the Belgian Catholic Boy Scouts and found his vocation as an artist under the tutelage of the Abbé Norbert Wallez, publisher of the Catholic journal *Le Vingtième Siècle* and advocate of a militant social Catholicism, anti-Bolshevist, anticapitalist, anti-Semitic and pro-colonialist.

More artist than thinker, Hergé tended to absorb the influences that surrounded him. The childlike natives in *Tintin in the Congo* and the hook-nosed Jewish financiers that crop up in Hergé's early efforts were all he knew then, he said later. As political currents shifted he tried to find neutral ground, but often misread the signs of the times.

Yet there is a more edifying story to be told. Tintin is consistently the defender of the oppressed. He socks the arrogant colonialist he finds harassing a rickshaw driver, rescues the human cargo of a slave trafficker's ship, defends gypsies and Indians and contends against gangsters and despots. When Hergé decided, in 1933, that his next Tintin adventure would take place in China—he felt a strong identification with the Chinese under occupation by Japan—he turned to three sympathetic Catholic priests for advice, and through one of them met Chang Chong-Chen, in Brussels on a fine arts scholarship. They became the best of friends. Chang taught Hergé Chinese calligraphy and philosophy and endlessly described the details of his life in Shanghai. "I discovered a new world," Hergé said, and with it a new resolve to base his portraits of other cultures on assiduous research. This new "documentalist" approach was, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, a breakthrough in ethnography. Chang would also become a character in The Adventures of Tintin, and in many ways Tintin's dearest friend. In *The Blue Lotus*, the two friends, having instantly cured each other of xenophobia, dissolve in laughter over their former prejudices.

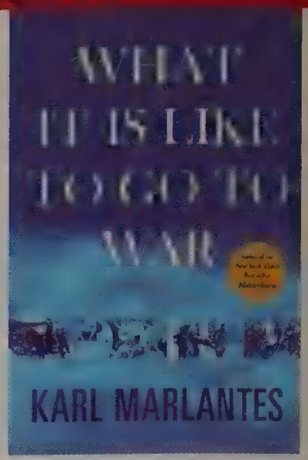
But Hergé remained a troubled soul. In the 1950s, as his first marriage was breaking up, he was frightened by nightmares involving "great white spaces." To resolve his guilt, he sent Tintin on the most metaphysical of his adventures—desperately searching amid the great white spaces, remote monasteries and yeti caves of Tibet for his lost friend Chang. For many years the real Chang was lost too; when they were reunited in 1981, Chang was recovering from imprisonment by the Red Guard, and Hergé was suffering from the disease that would claim him in 1983.

"I poured myself into Tintin," Hergé would often say; and whether or not this resolved his moral struggles, he gave the world a true hero, a company of madcap friends and a vision of sheer goodness as the greatest human adventure.

Carol Zaleski is professor of world religions at Smith College.

What war does to warriors

by Stanley Hauerwas



What It Is Like to Go to War
By Karl Marlantes
Atlantic Monthly Press, 272 pp., $25.00

It seemed that nothing, absolutely nothing could stack up against the intensity of war and war's friendships. I felt only intensely empty."

Readers of Karl Marlantes's novel *Matterhorn* will recognize why war is so compelling for Marlantes, as well as why life after war seems so empty. For in spite of the brutality depicted in the novel, the reader cannot but become mesmerized by the beauty of battle that Marlantes so graphically describes. At times I had to force myself to stop reading *Matterhorn* because I was enthralled by the sheer horror in his account of the Vietnam War.

What It Is Like to Go to War is the sequel to Marlantes's novel. I call it a sequel even though it is not a novel. Rather, it is perhaps best understood as a commentary on the novel. Many of the events described in *Matterhorn* reappear in this second book, making it clear that much of the novel is a fictionalized account of Marlantes's experiences in Vietnam as a lieutenant in the Marine Corps. That takes nothing away from the novel, but it does mean that these books need to be read together. In *What It Is Like to Go to War* Marlantes explicitly develops the suggestion in the novel that war provides a sense of transcendence and integrity that can be found nowhere else in our lives.

As many other stories suggest, war makes possible a bond between warriors that is absent in most of our lives. For example, in *Matterhorn*, Marlantes describes an assault in which his men came under withering fire while ascending a mountain. Some of his men dropped to the ground, afraid to go farther. But, Marlantes tells us:

> The attack went on—not because of any conscious decision, but because of friendship. Jackson went running forward, more to see if Fracasso was alive than for tactical reasons. Vancouver saw Jackson heading for the lieutenant and decided that even if the platoon were in a hopeless shit sandwich he'd be goddamned if he let Jackson run forward alone. So he kept going. Connolly, seeing Vancouver charging forward, did exactly the same, although his mind cried out to him to merge with the great welcoming earth beneath his feet. He wouldn't abandon a friend to go it alone. Neither would any of the others.

Marlantes suggests that the bond between warriors—a bond that at times could even transcend the racism so present in the military culture in Vietnam—is forged by the most determinative reality of war: warriors may actually find that they enjoy killing. He observes that "there is a deep savage joy in destruction, a joy beyond ego enhancement." Though Marlantes acknowledges that transcendence can be achieved in certain modes of creativity, he argues that in war it is far easier to take the path of transcendence through destruction. He confesses, "There's part of me that just loves maiming, killing, and torturing." That part is not all of him; if it were, he could not have written this book. But it is certainly there.

His experience in Vietnam means that it will always be there. Marlantes is a member of an exclusive club: the club of warriors. The club is constituted by a code of silence in which tales of horror, tales that are filled with transcendence made possible through the constant presence of death, are told only to other members of the club because only they have shared the horror as well as the love of killing. But membership in the club also brings isolation from those whom they allegedly served by going to war.

Marlantes confesses that he has written this book 40 years after his Vietnam experience in an attempt to come to terms with his experience of combat. One suspects that he wrote *Matterhorn* for the same reason. He acknowledges that he could have kept his thoughts in a personal journal, but he has published the story in the hope that other combat veterans will be better able to integrate their combat experience into their lives. For, as he notes, the silence that surrounds those who have suffered the violence of war relates not only to the violence that was inflicted on them but also to the violence they inflicted on others.

He writes, therefore, as a moralist determined to break the silence that surrounds the work of war—that is, the work of killing the enemy before the enemy kills you. He is trying to help those who have not experienced war to understand that the deepest challenge of war is the killing. The problem, according to Marlantes, is quite simple: the Marine Corps taught him how to kill, but it did not teach him how to deal with killing.

Killing affects warriors, Marlantes observes, because it was drilled into them from childhood that they should not kill. This is why the warrior will almost always

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Stanley Hauerwas teaches theological ethics at Duke University and is the author of War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity *(Baker Academic).*

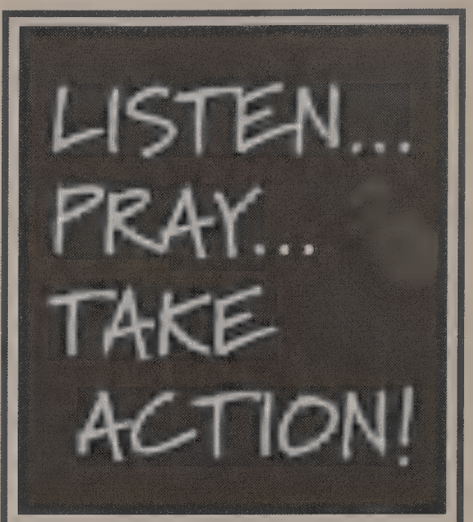
kill with the conviction—developed by basic training that aims at eliminating the enemy's humanity—that at the time of the killing the enemy is not human. Yet later, when life returns to normal and the warrior remembers killing a young enemy soldier who couldn't have been more than 25, he cannot repress the thought that he could have been killing his own son.

Marlantes stresses how important it is for those who have been transformed by battle—a transformation that he thinks bears all the marks of a religious conversion—to have someone to whom they can return. He observes that you cannot expect a normal 18-year-old to kill someone and contain it in a healthy way. Warriors know how much pain they have caused and how much evil they have done, so cheering for them is equivalent to cheering for a surgeon who has amputated a leg to save a life. What is needed is a community that can receive them back with a sadness appropriate to the acknowledgment that they have killed other human beings. Marlantes confesses that he has finally reached a place where he no longer feels guilty about having killed to help or save a fellow marine. He simply feels sad. It is this sadness that he thinks must become part of the formation of those we will send to kill for us in the future.

Marlantes is no pacifist. He thinks that sides must be chosen. He supported the decision to go to war to kill Osama bin Laden and to remove Saddam Hussein. These were loathsome tasks that conscientious persons had to perform. Yet the question is how those so called to be warriors can perform the violence they must enact and still maintain their humanity. How do you train 18-year-olds to kill without releasing the dark warrior of Mars, the god of war? Marlantes offers no simple solution, but he does think that warriors must receive some form of spiritual training.

Even more important, Marlantes thinks that we need a new mythology about war itself. In war, one is constantly aware of the inevitability of one's death, as well as constantly focused on the present moment. Warriors even value the lives of others over their own because they think that they are part of a larger community that makes intelligible their killing and dying. If we are to be saved from the appeal of war, transcendence and intensity must come through other means. The substitute for war is not peace but love, art and creativity. According to Marlantes, at the very least future warriors must know the people in whose name they kill.

I am a pacifist. Some might suspect that I am calling attention to Marlantes's work in order to cast doubt on his justifications of war because of the brutality of war. However, I have always thought it a mistake to use the terror that war is as an argument against war. We live in a dangerous world. We cannot ignore the reality that those committed to nonviolence may have to watch the innocent suffer for their conviction. The reason I think work like Marlantes's is so important for pacifists and just warriors alike is that I recognize the hard-won humanity represented by his determination to help us comprehend the reality of war. If Christians can ever hope to be a people who are so intense that we may be an alternative to war, we cannot be less human than those who, like Marlantes, have refused to justify what they have had to do in battle.



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Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison: A Biography

By Martin E. Marty

Princeton University Press, 288 pp., $24.95

Though some of his admirers may find it difficult to believe now, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was not widely known in the years immediately following World War II, save perhaps as one of a band of courageous pastors and theologians in Germany who resisted the Nazi regime of Adolf Hitler. His relative anonymity came to an end virtually overnight with the publication of a collection of his letters and other papers that had been smuggled out of the prison where he had been confined on suspicion of crimes again the state. This correspondence contained a series of provocative notions about the world and the church that generated wave after wave of enthusiastic response, conferring on their author a celebrity (or, for some, a notoriety) that had not been his during his relatively short lifetime. Today, 60 years after the first edition of *Letters and Papers from Prison* appeared, this unusual book, written by an unusual kind of theologian, continues to fascinate new generations of readers.

Thanks to Martin Marty and the Lives of Great Religious Books series published by Princeton University Press, the story of the origin, interpretation and influence of *Letters and Papers from Prison*, long familiar to Bonhoeffer specialists, is now available to a wider public.

As Marty carefully documents, what caught the attention of readers were Bonhoeffer's radical thoughts about the future of Christianity in the postwar world, which appear late in the book. A world come of age that no longer needs the hypothesis of "God," religionless Christianity, and a this-worldly faith capable of living fully in the world *etis deus non daretur*—even if there were no God—these ideas captivated the attention of many for whom the old ideas and institutions of the church no longer seemed adequate. Combined with Bonhoeffer's struggle against tyranny and his tragic death, they earned for the book its status as a classic theological text of the 20th century.

Do these ideas indicate a clear breach in Bonhoeffer's thought, such that late in his life he jettisoned virtually everything that he had previously affirmed and confessed as a Christian? Or is there a continuity between these radical concepts and what he had believed and written before about discipleship, Christology, life together in the church and so on? These questions, which are still widely debated both at academic conferences and in informal settings, justly constitute the main plot of Marty's "biography" of *Letters and Papers*.

The story begins with the extraordinary circumstances of the book's conception and birth. In spite of his imprisonment and at no small risk to himself and the people to whom he wrote, Bonhoeffer managed to maintain a lively correspondence with a number of people, above all with his best friend, Eberhard Bethge. Bethge carefully preserved most of what he received (he was forced to burn the last few pages just before his own arrest), collected additional materials from others after the war, circulated the letters and papers among a small circle of colleagues to see if they merited wider distribution, and only then, after much deliberation and encouragement, published the first edition in 1951, followed by an English language edition the next year.

Marty notes that Bethge only gradually came to the conclusion that these scattered and seemingly random scraps should be published. Though it sounds strange to American ears now, in postwar Germany there were still many who considered Bonhoeffer a traitor because of his participation in the conspiracy against Hitler. Bethge also worried that professional theologians might not take this work seriously, given that Bonhoeffer did not occupy a proper academic post. In addition, he was concerned about the esoteric nature of the book and the fragmentary character of the later letters. The book overcame these obstacles and now stands as a landmark of theology.

After a time Bethge also came to see that *Letters and Papers* was a dangerous book, its unguarded and undeveloped ruminations (intended as trial balloons for his own eyes and maybe a few others') susceptible to multiple and often extreme interpretations. These "creative misuses," as one scholar called them, quickly defined the boundaries within which the book was received, but they also gave to its author a level of visibility that heretofore he had not known. Marty expertly discusses the handful of theologians—among them Hanfried Müller in communist East Germany, John A. T. Robinson in England and Harvey Cox and William Hamilton in this country—who latched on to isolated comments, most having to do with the end of religion and living in a godless world, and used them to great effect to advance their own theological agendas.

More seasoned interpreters of Bonhoeffer, including Bethge, offered corrections to these one-sided interpreta-

Reviewed by Barry Harvey, *professor of theology at Baylor University.*



tions, providing context, filling in lacunae and demonstrating to the satisfaction of most readers that though these fragmentary reflections did represent genuine development in Bonhoeffer's thought, they were nonetheless in line with what he had said and written previously. The various responses did not dampen interest in the book; as Marty amply demonstrates, the volume continues to attract readers from many traditions, including Roman Catholics and American evangelicals (though the latter typically focus on texts that predate his imprisonment).

Marty also tracks the ways that *Letters and Papers* has found receptive audiences in South Africa, Latin America and Asia and among black theologians in the United States. This reception has not been uncritical, but many continue to discover in the book ideas that resonate with the quest for freedom and civil rights. According to theologian Josiah Young, for example, Bonhoeffer's writings retained marks of the privilege, paternalism and Eurocentrism he inherited from his upper-middle-class formation, but his contention that it is not the religious act but participation in the suffering of God that marks the Christian in the world is still pertinent to the context of the beaten-down African other.

Marty's biography of *Letters and Papers from Prison* is timely, for though we seldom encounter the kind of blatant poaching of Bonhoeffer's statements that occurred in the 1950s and '60s, the fragmentary character of the prison correspondence still invites individuals from a wide variety of ideological positions to conscript his last theological testament for their peculiar causes. Marty's work suffers from no such flaw; if anything, he errs on the opposite side. Other than coming down on the side of continuity with what Bonhoeffer had written previously (which, given the scholarly work done in this regard, is to be expected), he is reticent to hazard an interpretation of the late letters.

Biography can be a powerful genre for theology, as Bethge's classic biography of Bonhoeffer demonstrates. Both the casual fan and the serious scholar should commend Marty for his fine account of Bonhoeffer's most famous and most enigmatic book.

Quest for Spiritual Community: Reclaiming Spiritual Guidance for Contemporary Congregations

By Angela H. Reed
T & T Clark International, 208 pp., $26.95 paperback

A few years ago our local group of clergy met to discuss the level of spiritual maturity in our congregations. What put us onto the topic was research from Willow Creek Community Church that found no correlation between high involvement in the normal activities of congregational life and growth toward spiritual maturity.

The researchers discovered that although congregations generally fostered growth in the early to middle range of spiritual maturity, they were not doing much to further continuing growth in their most spiritually mature members. Indeed, some of those members were leaving congregations in a quest for avenues of spiritual growth that were only available elsewhere.

In my clergy group these findings came like a slap in the face. But we agreed that they described what we sensed to be true in our congregations, which were generally not doing much to foster spiritual growth, especially in more mature people. Around the table that day, we lamented how much energy we pour into bazaars and spaghetti suppers while the more important work of spiritual growth languishes. Our desire is for congregations to become flourishing greenhouses, but few of us had any idea what nutrients might lead to the kind of growth we are hoping for.

My clergy group might like to read Angela Reed's *Quest for Spiritual Community*. Reed maintains that congregations provide the best greenhouses for authentic spiritual guidance. However, she contends, maturity does not simply grow from ordinary congregational life; rather, it is the fruit of ministries of spiritual guidance.

The book is a revised version of Reed's Princeton dissertation, but she avoids academic jargon and convoluted sentences. She begins with a simple question that few people have yet researched: What happens in congregational life when a pastor or key lay leader receives training in spiritual guidance and then initiates some form of that ministry in the congregation? For several decades now, programs from a wide array of denominational traditions have been training spiritual directors. What effects do those trained people have on spiritual formation when they return to their local congregations?

To find answers, Reed selected three Presbyterian and three Mennonite congregations in North America where at least one pastor or layperson was

Reviewed by Daniel Schrock, *pastor at Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship in Goshen, Indiana. He is author of* The Dark Night: A Gift of God *and coeditor of a forthcoming volume on small group spiritual direction to be released by Church Publishing, Inc.*

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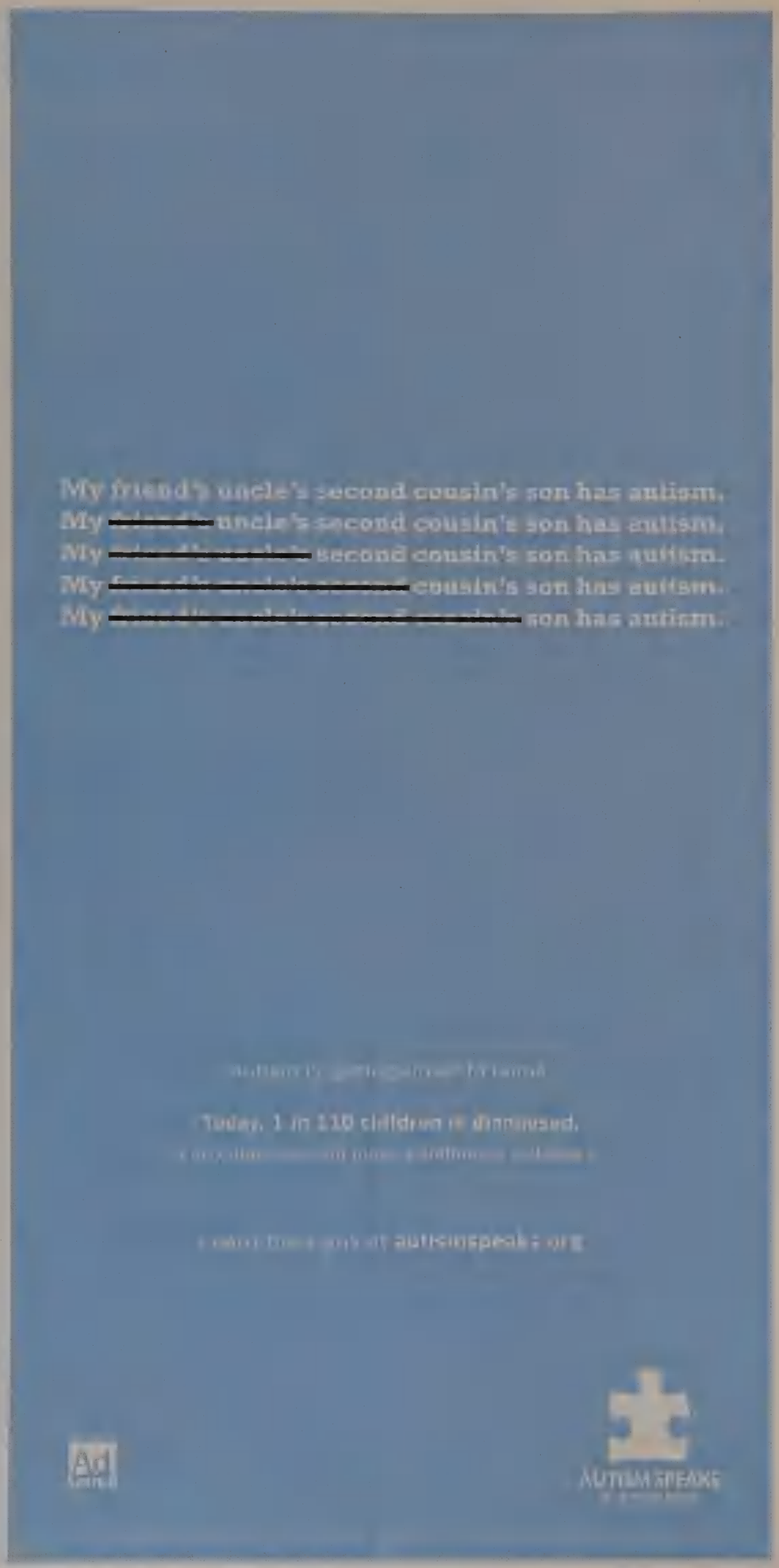
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trained in spiritual direction and had developed a ministry of spiritual guidance lasting for at least two years and involving at least four persons. She then conducted interviews with church members and collected observations by participating in worship and other communal activities.

Reed, who teaches practical theology and spiritual formation at Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, discovered that pastors in these congregations consistently imagined their role to be that of spiritual guide. They listened more than talked, they had right-sized rather than outsized views of themselves, they helped others notice God's fingerprints in daily life, they developed a congregational culture of spiritual conversation, and they understood success as a matter of surrendering to God rather than fixing problems.

Such leaders, Reed found, had salubrious effects on their congregations. People in the congregation were more aware of God during the week, entertained new images and ideas of God, felt a heightened sense of belonging to the congregation, grew in their ability to discern calls to ministry and service, and seemed ready to support the congregation's mission.

Quest for Spiritual Community is no mere research report. Reed uses Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the Holy Spirit to construct a framework for spiritual guidance. Rather than laying out a rigid programmatic agenda, she offers a way

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to understand the congregation as God's primary locus for spiritual guidance, one that fosters spiritual maturity through one-on-one spiritual direction, spiritual friendships and small-group spiritual direction.

Reed's work proffers at least two gifts. First, she proposes that congregational ministries of spiritual guidance can provide a congenial environment for spiritual questers of all ages who are tempted to search for God outside of church life. Arguing that the person who goes it alone will necessarily be spiritually truncated, she knows that only the communal context of a congregation with the Trinity at its heart can shape authentic spiritual maturity.

Second, she turns the reader's gaze back to the congregational context of Christian spirituality. The academic discipline of Christian spirituality has long attended to historical and theological contexts, and more recently to cultural, ethnic and social contexts, but writers have rarely inquired about the ecclesiological context of the lived experience of Christian faith and practice. Her passion for congregations winsomely beckons us to treasure anew these earthen vessels.

Reed implicitly celebrates a growing trend for pastors and other congregational leaders to be trained in ministries of spiritual guidance. At the same time, her book nudges training programs to imagine ways of not only teaching the classic model of one-on-one spiritual direction, but also of preparing students to lead spiritual direction small groups and to guide whole congregations as corporate bodies.

What of congregations that don't have pastors or key lay leaders who've been trained in spiritual guidance? Reed admits that not every pastor is called to practice formal spiritual direction. However, she rightly points out that with greater or lesser awareness all pastors engage in spiritual guidance. Everything a congregation does, from worship to mission, affects the spiritual formation of participants. Reed is a trustworthy guide who helps us ponder how cultivating spiritual guidance in our congregations might cause spiritual maturity to flourish.

BookMarks

When She Woke

By Hillary Jordan
Algonquin, 344 pp., $24.95

In Jordan's dystopian reimagining of *The Scarlet Letter*, convicted criminals are given an implant that alters their skin color to match their crime—a process called "chroming"—and then reintroduced into a society that shames them accordingly. Hannah Payne, convicted of murder for having an abortion, is chromed scarlet red. Refusing to implicate the father of her child—a married, nationally beloved megachurch pastor whom she stubbornly wants to protect—and kept away from her devoutly religious family, she tries to start a new life as a branded woman. Her once unshakable faith is ragged as she navigates a brutal world convinced of its own righteousness.

Burning Bright: Stories

By Ron Rash
Ecco, 224 pp., $22.99

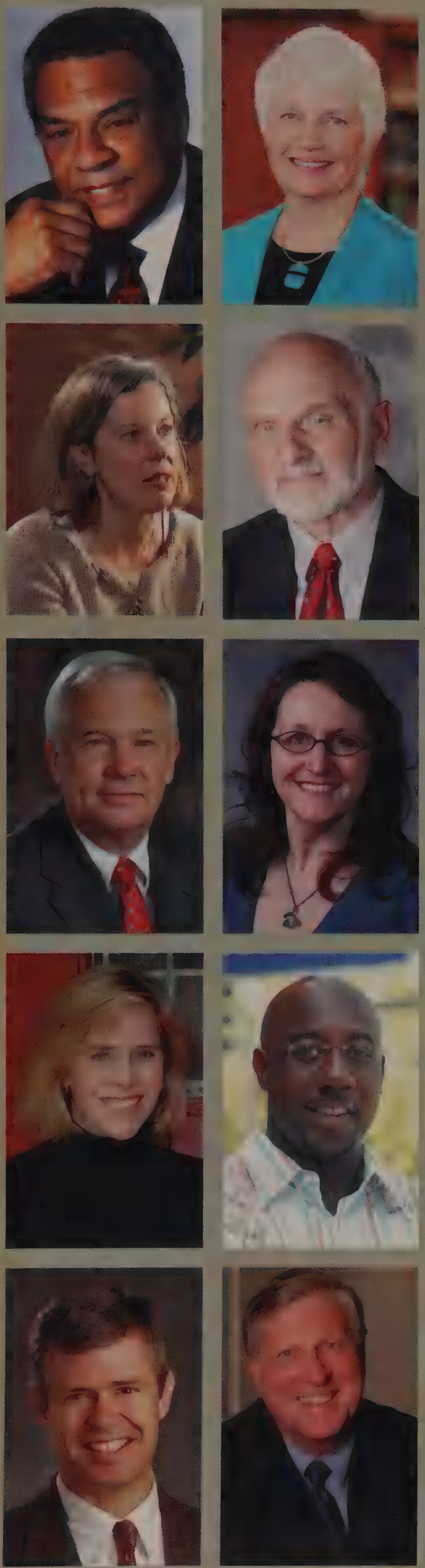
Rash lives in and writes about Appalachia, and his stories never leave that home, even when they're set at the end of the Civil War (as in "Lincolnites"). Although his home is a beautiful place with pockets of stunning wildness, Rash's characters find life there to be harsh and mean. Yes, there are kindnesses exchanged in these stories, as well as intimacies and pockets of a dark, conspiratorial humor (e.g., "Dead Confederates"), but these moments have a kind of desperation to them, planted amid the brutal ugliness of poverty, drug addiction and violence. Poverty seeps into everything and everyone and generates cruelty and numbing loneliness. Rash's ruthless clarity and spare, beautifully executed stories alert us to some neighbors who would otherwise be invisible to many of us.



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Let the WORDS of my mouth

ON Film



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DARK ADDICTION: Brandon* (Michael Fassbender) *lives with a sex addiction, memories of past abuses and a self-destructive sister.

Shame

Directed by Steve McQueen
Starring Michael Fassbender and Carey Mulligan

You might assume that an NC-17 movie about sex addiction starring the striking Michael Fassbender and featuring rampant nudity and graphic depictions of various sex acts would have a certain erotic allure. You would be wrong. *Shame* is a painfully sad tale of a man lost in a world of one-night stands, anonymous hookups, visits from prostitutes, pornography chat rooms and public bathroom stalls where frantic masturbation is as common as going outside to catch a smoke.

The addict in question, Brandon (Fassbender), is a successful businessman living in a sleek, soulless Manhattan apartment. His only mission in life seems to be discovering his next orgasm. To that end, he eyes girls on the subway, hangs out in bars both seedy and chic and looks to score quickly so he can move on to the next sexual event. The majority of the first act examines how Brandon juggles his dangerous addiction with a full-time job.

The film shifts from quasi-documentary to domestic drama with the arrival of Brandon's sister, Sissy (Carey Mulligan), a lounge singer whose pathetic desire for love, both romantic and fraternal, is as intense as Brandon's rejection of intimacy. Broke and out of work, she pleads with Brandon to allow her to stay with him until she gets her bearings. He unhappily agrees, which sets up the central conflict of the movie.

While it seems obvious from their actions and interactions that Brandon and Sissy had rough childhoods, writer-director Steve McQueen (*Hunger*) and co-writer Abi Morgan scrupulously avoid providing specifics. We are left to fill in the blanks based on the occasional glance, grimace or smile of recognition. This approach not only makes us wonder what sorts of abuse led them down their self-destructive paths, but it forces us to imagine the worst about their own complicated relationship.

Even more heartbreaking are a few scenes that suggest what these two siblings could be like under different circumstances. ("We're not bad people," Sissy says at one point. "We just come from a bad place.") In the case of Brandon, that possibility appears in a sequence in which a burgeoning dating relationship is sabotaged by his addiction. For Sissy, it emerges in her tender and revealing rendition of "New York, New York" at a supper club, where her desperate longing for some sort of connection is stripped bare.

What makes *Shame* so fascinating as a study of addiction is that, unlike drugs or alcohol or any number of other obsessions that must be conquered or controlled, sex can and should be inextricably tied to love. The inability to control the one almost certainly rules out the possibility of embracing the other, which may be the saddest result of all.

Martha Marcy May Marlene

Written and directed by Sean Durkin
Starring Elizabeth Olsen and John Hawkes

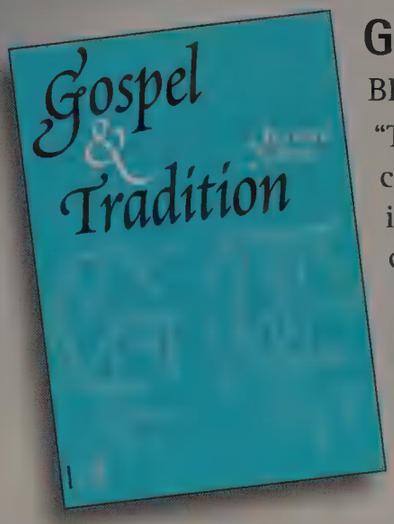
This first feature by writer-director Sean Durkin, a big hit at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival, centers on an enigmatic character with a minimal backstory. Martha (Elizabeth Olsen) is a 22-year-old who has spent the past two years living in a cult community in upstate New York.

As the tale begins, she has decided to escape. She disappears into the woods and eventually calls her sister—who hasn't heard from her in three years—to come pick her up. Martha is secretive with her sister about where she has been, but through a complex series of flashbacks and intercuts we learn what has happened and how it has affected her.

Part study of cult mentality, part examination of the consequences of a splintered family, *Martha Marcy May Marlene* is at its best in showing both how the attractive and easily swayed Martha is won over by the structure, discipline, camaraderie and faux gentleness of the cult community and how the charismatic cult leader, Patrick (John Hawkes), takes advantage of Martha's innocence. Also of interest is the way that the film turns from psychological drama to thriller as we begin to share Martha's inability to separate dream from reality and memory from fantasy—suggesting that the cult's evil is much closer than anyone thought.

Reviewed by John Petrakis, *who teaches screenwriting in Chicago.*

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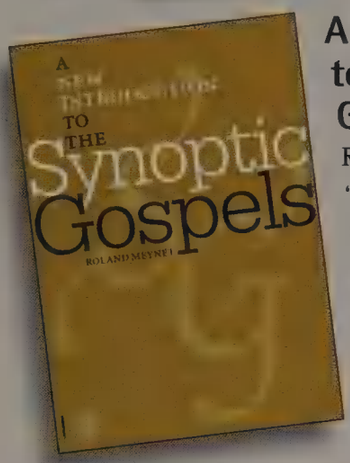
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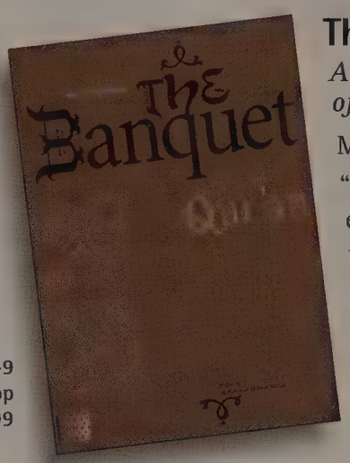


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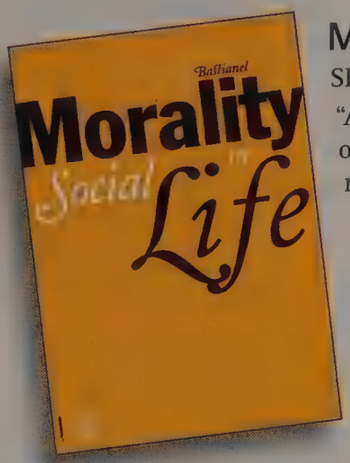
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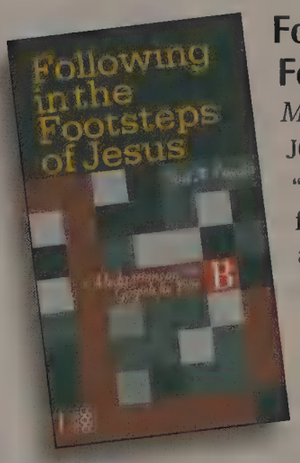
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by Philip Jenkins

The three days of Timkat

May I wish you all a happy and blessed Timkat season. Timkat, I should explain, is an important festival of the 40-million-strong Orthodox Church of Ethiopia. By common consent, it is one of the world's most spectacular religious festivals. A three-day celebration literally brings large areas of the country to a halt in a season dedicated to elaborate rituals, to feasting and gift giving, pageantry and mysticism. In vast pilgrimages and processions, individual churches parade their tabots—symbols of the Ark of the Covenant.

But what are Ethiopians celebrating so passionately? Timkat comes 12 days after Christmas, which in the local calendar means that it falls on January 17 through 19. Tourist guidebooks vaguely relate it to Epiphany. Actually, the event commemorates the baptism of Christ in the Jordan (*Timkat* is the Amharic word for baptism). Baptismal symbolism dominates the rituals to the point that enthusiastic believers plunge into consecrated pools to renew their vows. The baptismal theme recalls some very early debates in the Christian church, controversies that were raging not long after apostolic times. Timkat is, in fact, a startling relic of ancient Christian beliefs.

Churches around the world naturally make much of the Christmas season that marks the manifestation of God's glory in the world, but they vary greatly on the limits of the season and its exact meaning. For many Western Christians, the focus of the celebration tends to be not the actual birth but Epiphany and the visit of the Magi. Christians in the Orthodox tradition, however, link Epiphany to Christ's baptism in the Jordan.

In the first three Christian centuries, believers had very different ideas about the divinity of Christ and whether there was a particular moment at which he gained that status. Yes, Christ came into the world—but when exactly did that divinity shine forth?

The mainstream church believed, of course, that the baby born in Bethlehem was God incarnate, but powerful voices held rival views. For many early Christians, Jesus was a good or holy man, conceived and born in the usual way, and only at the moment of his baptism was he suddenly overwhelmed by the power of divinity, the Logos or Holy Spirit.

That understanding easily arises if one reads just the Gospels of Mark and John, without considering the birth stories of Matthew and Luke. Both Mark and John begin their narratives with the story of John the Baptist, followed by Jesus' baptism, when some extraordinary power seems to descend on him. At that point, Jesus flees into the wilderness, presumably to confront the astonishing new reality he has encountered. This is also the sequence of events in the lost gospel source called Q. Early in the second century, the influential thinker Cerinthus popularized the idea of Jesus being possessed and overwhelmed by a divine force at his baptism, and that became the standard gnostic view, which the larger church considered a gross heresy.

Yet the mainstream church never forgot its ancient fascination with Christ's baptism. Historians have long debated exactly why churches celebrate Christmas at midwinter. They usually link it to the Roman Saturnalia festival. But other agendas were at work. We know that late in the second century gnostic followers of the brilliant Alexandrian Basilides had a special veneration for Jesus' baptism, which they celebrated on January 6. This was the date at which God became manifest (to use the Greek word, it was the time of epiphany). The mainstream church appropriated the festival easily enough, as the lines between orthodoxy and heresy were not strictly defined in Egypt at this time. The baptism theme does not fit logically with the standard Christmas story that we know—most obviously, some 30 years separated birth and baptism—but such considerations did not prevent Egyptians from accommodating what might otherwise be seen as two irreconcilable views of Christ's appearance.

In light of those origins, let us look again at the Ethiopian Timkat. Although most of the church's earliest records have been lost, we know that Ethiopian Christianity was flourishing by the fourth century and that it had a very close relationship with the church in Egypt, especially Alexandria. Not surprisingly, then, Ethiopia keeps alive very early Egyptian interests and obsessions, even some that might have been forgotten in Egypt itself. Whatever the church's official theology says, Timkat recalls a very old and somewhat heretical interpretation of Christ's baptism and its significance.

If you want to see Timkat at its most spectacular, go to the celebrations in Ethiopia's royal city of Gondar. Gondar, by the way, was built in the 17th century by a great emperor who bore the auspicious name of Basilides.

Philip Jenkins recently wrote Jesus Wars, *on the christological controversies of the fifth century.*

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***The Annunciation,* by Eija-Liisa Ahtila**

When I started the work," writes video artist/photographer Eija-Liisa Ahtila, "the aim was to do a remake of the annunciation paintings with moving images to see what this powerful image in our culture would turn out to be and what it would mean in present-day Western society." The result, *The Annunciation*, is a three-channel multimedia installation exhibited at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. A mixture of stills of familiar paintings of the annunciation and acted scenes—with angels, a patron, donkeys, Mary, cultural Christmas snapshots and layers of angel wings—creates a layered narrative. In the 33-minute installation, Ahtila's work runs through cultural allusions and histories, moving in and through the natural and supernatural.

—Lil Copan


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